

Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,  
In thy most need to go by thy side.

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FICTION

ITALIAN SHORT STORIES  
FROM THE 13TH TO THE 20TH  
CENTURIES · INTRODUCTION  
BY DECIO PETTOELLO

# ITALIAN SHORT STORIES



FROM THE 13<sup>TH</sup> TO THE  
20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES



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# INTRODUCTION

## THE SHORT STORY IN ITALY

WHILE Dante and his friends in Florence were still singing of love and dreams in their *new style*, the short story (*novella*) appeared in Italian literature. We are at the end of the thirteenth century. The simple style is appropriate to the naive matter of the tales of the *Novellino* or *Cento Novelle Antiche*; artistry in prose is just beginning. Art ripens only when its instruments have already been used, and consequently refined, for a considerable time. But with Boccaccio it makes a wonderful advance; so wonderful that he remained for centuries the undisputed master of the short story in Europe.

He is and was considered a writer of licentious stories: this is true of a part of his *Decameron*. If, however, we count these stories, we find, to our surprise, that they do not constitute the greatest part of his famous book: the tragic or heroic, moral or comic subjects reveal Boccaccio's genius. But I should add that also many of the licentious tales do belong to the best Boccaccio, especially if we consider the epoch in which they were written and the licentious, though at the same time refined, Italian society of the fourteenth century. Besides, Chaucer and the great writers of the French Renaissance certainly would not blush at the coarse humour of Boccaccio's stories. The fact is that Boccaccio's narrative and descriptive power by far surpasses his shortcomings. His characters, very often admirable, inasmuch as they are full of life and psychologically developed, are truly modern.

His numerous imitators from the late fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century are very remarkable, but

seldom approach their model because they have not, generally speaking his insight and his narrative relief. Either they had a less wide view of life or purposes obviously moral and satirical rather than artistic or were satisfied with the plot as such and did not pay great attention to character study. As a consequence their stories are not so alive and convincing. Even Bandello does not reach Boccaccio's standard. This does not mean to say that Bandello's tales are not well constructed or that they do not present powerful and dramatic plots fully developed. But frequently they are too full so that action and characters are diluted to the point of prolixity. In fact his style has the faults of the great prose of his times.

In spite of that difference in artistic value those three centuries remain the golden period of the Italian *novella* which gave many a plot to the Elizabethan dramatists and could perhaps provide—*mutatis mutandis*—even modern authors with interesting hints.

The Italian story of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is mainly noticeable for bad taste or a didactic moralizing and unimaginative tone. But with Manzoni and the Romantic movement the revival was remarkable. Manzoni though he did not write short stories inserted a few episodes in his famous novel that can well be taken separately as very good stories detailed and yet not prolix somewhat uniform in style and yet rich in psychological analysis sympathy and humour. An art in short that seems simpler and easier than it is. Indeed even the best known short story writer of his school De Amicis only succeeded in imitating the external style of Manzoni. His *Cuore* is a good book but I do not think it goes beyond the category of juvenile literature. Fogazzaro who was also partly *Manzoniano* understood that it was easier to leave Manzoni aside and introduce sentimental and fantastic elements in his few stories. He was the centre of a small group of writers but the best of them Tommaso Gallarati Scotti unfortunately lapsed into rhetoric.

The short stories of what we might call an international type, parallel to the novels of the same pattern, have always had their vogue among a public of unpretentious readers, but have mostly remained outside the sphere of art. More pretentious were the stories drawing their inspiration from the novels of Victor Hugo and the French Romantics, but they fell in a declamatory and sensational genre. Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola, gave, on the contrary, a real impulse to realism—a realism of quite a different kind to Manzoni's; richer in imagination and vivacity, but less balanced perhaps, and imbued with a sort of scientific or evolutionistic dogmatism, much more absolute than that of the calm Christianity of Manzoni; so his humour disappeared to give place to a gloomy vision of life. Nevertheless the new realism gave several good writers, among whom Giovanni Verga deserves a place as a first-rate novelist and story-teller. He was a regionalist of Sicily and Southern Italy, as is, for Sardegna, the nearly as great Grazia Deledda; but this regionalism has a wider scope than its geographical and ethnical background because of its full artistic development. The realism of Verga is pessimistic but sincere, in the sense that he needs no exaggeration for his outlook, but simply to limit his attention to those strata of life where pessimism seems justified by reality.

Another kind of realism is that of Emilio De Marchi. It is more akin to that of Manzoni, but, here and there, through his Lombard regionalism, the sense of painful social problems impresses a mark of bitterness on it, together with a note of religious idealism. With less idealism but a more diffused bitterness and a much keener humour, Panzini may be ranked with De Marchi, though surpassing him as an artist.

Quite different is the realism of D'Annunzio. It might be called an over-coloured and decadent caricature of Verga's realism. If some of his first stories—like *Cincinnato*—remain an example of unsophisticated and lucid tales, the *Novelle della Pescara* stands to attest that the virtuoso requires the most atrocious matter of extreme and therefore artificial

realism to show his wonderful ability as a colourist. On reading them one would think of Italy as of a country of ferocious or mad people.

New impressionistic tendencies appear also in Italy at present but the new generation of writers seems to be still feeling its way. At the same time the middle-aged writers go on as they did before with grace and elegance sometimes slightly sceptic sometimes thoughtful or humorous or even a little sentimental. Besides the few mentioned above Caprin, Chiesa, Provenzi, Milanes, Prosperi and more than a score of living distinguished writers may still be considered the masters of the Italian short story of to-day. Notwithstanding the eclecticism of their art and inspiration they preserve evident links with the old Italian tradition.

DECIO PETTOELLO

CAMBRIDGE 1932

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*The Story of Two Huntsmen*, *The Spazzoletti Couple*, *Life is So Long*, *The Barrister's Three Cases*, *The Shoes*, *The Mare Margari*, *The Lost Day*, *The Enemy* and *The Man's Heart* have been translated by Miss Alethea Graham whom the Editor gratefully thanks.

Bibliographical note on p. 303

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	vii
HOW A LEARNED GREEK, WHOM A KING HELD IN PRISON, PASSED HIS JUDGMENT ON A HORSE . . . . . <i>From "Il Novellino"</i>	1
ELISA'S STORY OF GERBINO . . . . . <i>Giovanni Boccaccio</i>	3
THE STORY OF CALANDRINO . . . . . <i>Giovanni Boccaccio</i>	8
THE STORY OF TWO YOUNG MEN . . . . . <i>Giovanni Boccaccio</i>	16
THE FALCON . . . . . <i>Giovanni Boccaccio</i>	21
GALGANO'S LOVE . . . . . <i>Giovanni Fiorentino</i>	27
THE MILLER . . . . . <i>Franco Sacchetti</i>	31
MARIOTTO . . . . . <i>Massuccio Salernitano</i>	35
PORTANTINO'S PORK . . . . . <i>Sabardino degli Arienti</i>	41
THE STORY OF JULIET . . . . . <i>Luigi da Porto</i>	45
MERRIE PRANCES . . . . . <i>Count Baldassare Castiglione</i>	64
BELFAGOR . . . . . <i>Niccolo Machiavelli</i>	66
THE FALSE CARDINAL . . . . . <i>Giovanni Brevio</i>	76
TOMMASO'S TRICK . . . . . <i>Girolamo Parabosco</i>	84
DONNA AGNES' WILL . . . . . <i>Agnolo Firenzuola</i>	88
THE DUMB KNIGHT . . . . . <i>Matteo Bandello</i>	95
BANDITTI . . . . . <i>Giovambattista Giraldi Cinthio</i>	105
GHOSTS . . . . . <i>Anton-Francesco Grazzini</i>	109
A GOLDEN SHOWER . . . . . <i>Celio Malespini</i>	118
A NEW LIFE . . . . . <i>Domènico Maria Manni</i>	126
LET IT REST . . . . . <i>Carlo Gozzi</i>	132
THE SENTINEL . . . . . <i>Francesco Saverio</i>	135
THE STORY OF LUDOVICO . . . . . <i>Alessandro Manzoni</i>	138
THE MARK OF LOVE . . . . . <i>Giovanni Verga</i>	149
THE NEW HOUSE . . . . . <i>Luigi Capuana</i>	156
THE STORY OF TWO HUNSMEN . . . . . <i>G. Giacosa</i>	178
THE SPAZZOLETTI COUPLE . . . . . <i>E. De Marchi</i>	189
LIFE IS SO LONG . . . . . <i>Matilde Serao</i>	209
THE BARRISTER'S THREE CASES . . . . . <i>A. Panzini</i>	214
CINQUINATUS . . . . . <i>Gabriele D'Annunzio</i>	232
THE FIRE-BRIGADE . . . . . <i>Adolfo Albertazzi</i>	238

	PAGE
THE SIOES	<i>Gratia Deledda</i> 246
THE HARE	<i>Gratia Deledda</i> 253
MALGARI	<i>A Fogazzaro</i> 255
THE LOST DAY	<i>Giovanni Papini</i> 267
THE ENEMY	<i>Carola Prosperi</i> 273
POVERTY	<i>Federico Tozzi</i> 283
PICTURES ON SKULLS	<i>Massimo Bontempelli</i> 289
THE MAY'S HEART	<i>Giorgieri Coneri</i> 296
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX	303

## HOW A LEARNED GREEK, WHOM A KING HELD IN PRISON, PASSED HIS JUDGMENT ON A HORSE

FROM "IL NOVELLINO."

IN a certain part of Greece there lived a king of great sway, of the name of Philip. This king, for some alleged crime or other had imprisoned a Greek, a man of great learning, whose wisdom mounted to the skies. It happened one day that this monarch received from the King of Spain a present of a noble horse, of great size, and of a beautiful form. The king sent for his farrier to learn his opinion of the horse, but he was told that he had better apply to the learned Greek, who was reputed a man of universal knowledge. He therefore ordered the horse to be led into the field, and then commanded the Greek to be brought from his prison, and addressing him, said: "Master, let me have your opinion of this horse, for I have heard a great report of your wisdom." The Greek inspected the horse, and replied: "Sire, this horse is indeed a beautiful courser, but in my opinion he has been nurtured on asses' milk." The king sent to Spain to inquire how the horse had been brought up, and found that the dam had died, and that the foal, as the Greek had asserted, had been reared on asses' milk. This circumstance astonished the king not a little, and as a reward, he ordered half a loaf of bread a day to be given to the Greek at the expense of the court. It fell out on another occasion, that as the king was inspecting his jewels, he sent again for the Greek, and said to him: "Master mine, your knowledge is great, and it seems that you know all things. Tell me, I pray you, whether or not you understand the virtue of these stones, and which of them seems to you the most valuable." The Greek replied: "Sire, which of them do you yourself consider as the most precious?" The king then took up one of the most beautiful amongst them and said: "This one, master, seems to me the most beautiful, and one of the highest value." The Greek examined it, and straining it closely in the palm of his hand, and placing it to his ear, said:

' This stone, sire, appears to me to have a living worm in it ' The king sent for his lapidary, and ordered him to break the stone, and to their surprise the animal was found within The king now looked upon the Greek as a man of surprising wisdom, and ordered a whole loaf of bread to be given him daily at the expense of the court It happened not many days after this that the king, entertaining some suspicions of his own legitimacy, again sent for the Greek, and taking him into his closet, said

Master, I hold you for a man of great penetration, which indeed has been manifested in your answers to the questions I have proposed to you I wish you now to inform me whose son I am? The Greek then replied "Sire, how strange a request! You will know that you are the son of your honoured predecessor ' But the king, dissatisfied, said ' Do not evade my question, but tell me the truth explicitly, for if you hesitate, you shall instantly die the death of a traitor " ' Then, sire," answered the Greek, I must inform you that you are the son of a baker ' Upon this, the king being anxious to know the real truth sent for the queen mother, and by threats compelled her to confess that the words of the Greek were true The king then shut himself up in his chamber with the Greek, and said

Master mine I have received singular proofs of your wisdom, and I now entreat you to tell me how you have obtained a knowledge of these things ' Then the Greek replied "Sire, I will inform you With respect to the horse I knew that he had been nourished with asses milk from his hanging his ears, which is not natural to a horse And that there was a live worm in the stone I knew from the fact that stones are naturally cold but this one I found to be warm, and it was therefore evident that the heat could only proceed from a living animal within And how, said the king, ' did you discover that I was the son of a baker?' The Greek then replied "Because when I told you of the wonderful circumstance of the horse, you ordered me a gift of half a loaf a day, and when I told you of the stone with the living worm in it, you ordered me a whole loaf I then felt assured whose son you were, for if you had really been a king's son, you would have presented me with a city, as my merits deserved, whereas your natural disposition was satisfied in giving me a loaf, as your father the baker would have done The king was then sensible of his own meanness, and immediately liberated the Greek from prison, and loaded him with gifts of value

# ELISA'S STORY OF GERBINO

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

Gerbino, in breach of the plighted faith of his grandfather, King Guglielmo, attacks a ship of the King of Tunis to rescue thence his daughter. She being slain by those aboard the ship, he slays them, and afterwards he is beheaded.

GRACIOUS ladies, began Elisa, not a few there are that believe that Love looses no shafts save when he is kindled by the eyes, contemning their opinion that hold that passion may be engendered by words; whose error will be abundantly manifest in a story which I purpose to tell you; wherein you may see how mere rumour not only wrought mutual love in those that had never seen one another, but also brought both to a miserable death.

Guglielmo, the Second, as the Sicilians compute, King of Sicily, had two children, a son named Ruggieri, and a daughter named Gostanza. Ruggieri died before his father, and left a son named Gerbino; who, being carefully trained by his grandfather, grew up a most goodly gallant, and of great renown in court and camp, and that not only within the borders of Sicily, but in divers other parts of the world, among them Barbary, then tributary to the King of Sicily. And among others, to whose ears was wafted the bruit of Gerbino's magnificent prowess and courtesy, was a daughter of the King of Tunis, who, by averment of all that had seen her, was a creature as fair and debonair, and of as great and noble a spirit as Nature ever formed. To hear tell of brave men was her delight, and what she heard, now from one, now from another, of the brave deeds of Gerbino she treasured in her mind so sedulously, and pondered them with such pleasure, rehearsing them to herself in imagination, that she became hotly enamoured of him, and there was none of whom she talked, or heard others talk, so gladly. Nor, on the other hand, had the fame of her incomparable beauty and other excellences failed to travel, as to other lands, so also to Sicily, where, falling on Gerbino's ears,

it gave him no small delight, to such effect that he burned for the lady no less vehemently than she for him. Wherefore, until such time as he might, upon some worthy occasion, have his grandfather's leave to go to Tunis, yearning beyond measure to see her, he charged every friend of his, that went thither, to give her to know, as best he might, his great and secret love for her, and to bring him tidings of her. Which office one of the said friends discharged with no small address, for, having obtained access to her, after the manner of merchants by bringing jewels for her to look at, he fully apprised her of Gerbino's passion and placed him, and all that he possessed, entirely at her disposal. The lady received both messenger and message with gladsome mien, made answer that she loved with equal ardour, and in token thereof sent Gerbino one of her most precious jewels. Gerbino received the jewel with extreme delight, and sent her many a letter and many a precious gift by the hand of the same messenger, and twas well understood between them that, should Fortune accord him opportunity, he should see and know her.

On this footing the affair remained somewhat longer than was expedient and so, while Gerbino and the lady burned with mutual love, it befell that the King of Tunis gave her in marriage to the King of Granada whereat she was wroth beyond measure, for that she was not only going into a country remote from her lover, but, as she deemed, was severed from him altogether, and so this might not come to pass, gladly, could she but have seen how would she have left her father and fled to Gerbino. In like manner Gerbino on learning of the marriage, was vexed beyond measure, and was oft times minded, could he but find means to win to her husband by sea, to wrest her from him by force. Some rumour of Gerbino's love, and of his intent, reached the King of Tunis, who, knowing his prowess and power, took alarm and as the time drew nigh for conveying the lady to Granada sent word of his purpose to King Guglielmo, and craved his assurance that it might be carried into effect without let or hindrance on the part of Gerbino, or any one else. The old king had heard nothing of Gerbino's love affair, and never dreaming that 'twas on such account that the assurance was craved, granted it without demur, and in pledge thereof sent the King of Tunis his glove. Which received the king made ready a great and goodly ship in the port of Carthage, and equipped her with all things meet for those that were to man

her, and with all appointments apt and seemly for the reception of his daughter, and awaited only fair weather to send her therein to Granada. All which the young lady seeing and marking, sent one of her servants privily to Palermo, bidding him greet the illustrious Gerbino on her part, and tell him that a few days would see her on her way to Granada; wherefore 'twould now appear whether, or no, he were really as doughty a man as he was reputed, and loved her as much as he had so often protested. The servant did not fail to deliver her message exactly, and returned to Tunis, leaving Gerbino, who knew that his grandfather, King Guglielmo, had given the King of Tunis the desired assurance, at a loss how to act. But prompted by love, and goaded by the lady's words and loath to seem a craven, he hied him to Messina; and having there armed two light galleys, and manned them with good men and true, he put to sea, and stood for Sardinia, deeming that the lady's ship must pass that way. Nor was he far out in his reckoning; for he had not been there many days, when the ship, sped by a light breeze, hove in sight not far from the place where he lay in wait for her. Whereupon Gerbino said to his comrades: "Gentlemen, if you be as good men and true as I deem you, there is none of you but must have felt, if he feel not now, the might of love; for without love I deem no mortal capable of true worth or aught that is good; and if you are or have been in love, 'twill be easy for you to understand that which I desire. I love, and 'tis because I love that I have laid this travail upon you; and that which I love is in the ship that you see before you, which is fraught not only with my beloved, but with immense treasures, which, if you are good men and true, we, so we but play the man in fight, may with little trouble make our own; nor for my share of the spoils of the victory demand I aught but a lady, whose love it is that prompts me to take arms: all else I freely cede to you from this very hour. Forward, then; attack we this ship; success should be ours, for God favours our enterprise, nor lends her wind to evade us." Fewer words might have sufficed the illustrious Gerbino; for the rapacious Messinese that were with him were already bent heart and soul upon that to which by his harangue he sought to animate them. So, when he had done, they raised a mighty shout, so that 'twas as if trumpets did blare, and caught up their arms, and smiting the water with their oars, overhauled the ship. The advancing galleys

were observed while they were yet a great way off by the ship's crew, who, not being able to avoid the combat, put themselves in a posture of defence. Arrived at close quarters, the illustrious Gerbino bade send the ship's masters aboard the galleys, unless they were minded to do battle. Certified of the challenge, and who they were that made it, the Saracens answered that 'twas in breach of the faith plighted to them by their assailants' king that they were thus attacked, and in token thereof displayed King Guglielmo's glove, averring in set terms that there should be no surrender either of themselves or of aught that was aboard the ship without battle. Gerbino, who had observed the lady standing on the ship's poop, and seen that she was far more beautiful than he had imagined, burned with a yet fiercer flame than before, and to the display of the glove made answer that, as he had no falcons there just then, the glove booted him not, wherefore, so they were not minded to surrender the lady, let them prepare to receive battle. Whereupon, without further delay, the battle began on both sides with a furious discharge of arrows and stones, on which wise it was long protracted to their common loss, until at last Gerbino seeing that he gained little advantage, took a light bark which they had brought from Sardinia, and having fired her bore down with her, and both the galleys, upon the ship. Whereupon the Saracens, seeing that they must perforce surrender the ship or die, caused the king's daughter, who lay beneath the deck weeping, to come up on deck, and led her to the prow, and shouting to Gerbino, while the lady shrieked alternately 'mercy' and "succour," opened her veins before his eyes, and cast her into the sea, saying "Take her, we give her to thee on such wise as we can, and as thy faith has merited." Maddened to witness this deed of barbarism, Gerbino, as if courting death, recked no more of the arrows and the stones but drew alongside the ship, and, despite the resistance of her crew, boarded her, and as a famished lion ravens amongst a herd of oxen, and tearing and rending, now one, now another, gluts his wrath before he appeases his hunger, so Gerbino, sword in hand, hacking and hewing on all sides among the Saracens did ruthlessly slaughter not a few of them, till, as the burning ship began to blaze more fiercely, he bade the sea men take thereout all that they might by way of guerdon, which done, he quitted her, having gained but a rueful victory over his adversaries. His next care was to recover from the sea the

body of the fair lady, whom long and with many a tear he mourned: and so he returned to Sicily, and gave the body honourable sepulture in Ustica, an islet that faces, as it were, Trapani, and went home the saddest man alive.

When these tidings reached the King of Tunis, he sent to King Guglielmo ambassadors, habited in black, who made complaint of the breach of faith and recited the manner of its occurrence. Which caused King Guglielmo no small chagrin; and seeing not how he might refuse the justice they demanded, he had Gerbino arrested, and he himself, none of his barons being able by any entreaty to turn him from his purpose, sentenced him to forfeit his head, and had it severed from his body in his presence, preferring to suffer the loss of his only grandson than to gain the reputation of a faithless king. And so, miserably, within the compass of a few brief days, died the two lovers by woeful deaths, as I have told you, and without having known any joyance of their love.

# THE STORY OF CALANDRINO

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

Calandrino Bruno and Buffalmacco go in quest of the heliotrope beside the Mugnone Thinking to have found it Calandrino gets him home laden with stones His wife chides him whereat he waxes wroth beats her and tells his comrades what they know better than he

EVERYBODY Pamfilo's story which moved the ladies to inextinguishable laughter, the queen bade Elisa follow suit whereupon, laughing she thus began I know not, debonair my ladies, whether with my little story which is no less true than entertaining I shall give you occasion to laugh as much as Pamfilo has done with his but I will do my best.

In our city where there has never been lack of odd humours and queer folk there dwelt, no long time ago, a painter named Calandrino a simple soul, of uncouth manners that spent most of his time with two other painters the one Bruno, the other Buffalmacco by name pleasant fellows enough, but not without their full share of sound and shrewd sense, and who kept with Calandrino for that they not seldom found his singular ways and his simplicity very diverting There was also at the same time at Florence one Maso del Saggio, a fellow marvellously entertaining by his cleverness, dexterity and unfailing resource, who having heard somewhat touching Calandrino's simplicity, resolved to make fun of him by playing him a trick, and inducing him to believe some prodigy And happening one day to come upon Calandrino in the church of San Giovanni where he sate intently regarding the paintings and intaglios of the tabernacle above the altar, which had then but lately been set there, he deemed time and place convenient for the execution of his design, which he accordingly imparted to one of his comrades whereupon the two men drew nigh the place where Calandrino sate alone and feigning not to see him fell a talking of the virtues of divers stones, of which Maso spoke as aptly and pertinently as if he had been a great and learned lapidary

Calandrino heard what passed between them, and witting that 'twas no secret, after a while got up, and joined them, to Maso's no small delight. He therefore continued his discourse, and being asked by Calandrino, where these stones of such rare virtues were to be found, made answer: "Chiefly in Berlinzone, in the land of the Basques. The district is called Bengodi, and there they bind the vines with sausages, and there is a goose and a gander too, that lay money; and on a mountain, all of grated Parmesan cheese, dwell folk that do nought else but make macaroni and raviuoli, and boil them in capon's broth, and then throw them down to be scrambled for; and hard by flows a rivulet of Vernaccia, the best that ever was drunk, and never a drop of water therein." "Ah! 'tis a sweet country!" quoth Calandrino; "but tell me, what becomes of the capons that they boil?" "They are all eaten by the Basques," replied Maso. Then: "Wast thou ever there?" quoth Calandrino. Whereupon: "Was I ever there, sayest thou?" replied Maso. "Why, if I have been there once, I have been there a thousand times." "And how many miles is 't from here?" quoth Calandrino. "Oh!" returned Maso, "more than thou couldst number in a night without slumber." "Farther off, then, than the Abruzzi?" said Calandrino. "Why, yes, 'tis a bit farther," replied Maso.

Now Calandrino, like the simple soul that he was, marking the composed and grave countenance with which Maso spoke, could not have believed him more thoroughly if he had uttered the most patent truth, and thus taking his words for gospel: "'Tis a trifle too far for my purse," quoth he; "were it nigher, I warrant thee, I would go with thee thither one while, just to see the macaroni come tumbling down, and take my fill thereof. But tell me, so good luck befall thee, are none of these stones, that have these rare virtues, to be found in these regions?" "Ay," replied Maso, "two sorts of stone are found there, both of virtues extraordinary. The one sort are the sandstones of Settignano and Montesci, which being made into millstones, by virtue thereof flour is made; wherefore 'tis a common saying in those countries that blessings come from God and millstones from Montesci: but, for that these sandstones are in great plenty, they are held cheap by us, just as by them are emeralds, whereof they have mountains, bigger than Monte Morello, that shine at midnight, a God's name! And know this, that whoso should make a goodly pair of millstones, and connect them

with a ring before ever a hole was drilled in them, and take them to the Soldan, should get all he would have thereby. The other sort of stone is the heliotrope, as we lapidaries call it, a stone of very great virtue, inasmuch as whoso carries it on his person is seen, so long as he keep it, by never another soul, where he is not." "These be virtues great indeed," quoth Calandrino, "but where is this second stone to be found?" Whereto Maso made answer that there were usually some to be found in the Mugnone. "And what are its size and colour?" quoth Calandrino. "The size varies," replied Maso, "for some are bigger and some smaller than others, but all are of the same colour, being nearly black." All these matters duly marked and fixed in his memory, Calandrino made as if he had other things to attend to, and took his leave of Maso with the intention of going in quest of the stone, but not until he had let his especial friends, Bruno and Buffalmacco, know of his project. So, that no time might be lost, but, postponing everything else, they might begin the quest at once, he set about looking for them, and spent the whole morning in the search. At length, when 'twas already past noon, he called to mind that they would be at work in the Faentine women's convent, and though 'twas excessively hot he let nothing stand in his way, but at a pace that was more like a run than a walk, hied him thither, and so soon as he had made them ware of his presence, thus he spoke: "Comrades so you are but minded to hearken to me, 'tis in our power to become the richest men in Florence, for I am informed by one that may be trusted that there is a kind of stone in the Mugnone which renders whoso carries it invisible to every other soul in the world. Wherefore, methinks, we were wise to let none have the start of us, but go search for this stone without any delay. We shall find it without a doubt, for I know what 'tis like and when we have found it, we have but to put it in the purse and get us to the money-changers, whose counters, as you know, are always laden with groats and florins, and help ourselves to as many as we have a mind to. No one will see us and so, hey presto! we shall be rich folk in the twinkling of an eye, and have no more need to go besmearing the walls all day long like so many snails." Whereat Bruno and Buffalmacco began only to laugh, and exchanging glances, made as if they marvelled exceedingly, and expressed approval of Calandrino's project. Then Buffalmacco asked, what might be the name of the stone. Calandrino, like the numskull that

he was, had already forgotten the name; so he made answer: "Why need we concern ourselves with the name, since we know the stone's virtue? methinks we were best to go look for it, and waste no more time." "Well, well," said Bruno, "but what are the size and shape of the stone?" "They are of all sizes and shapes," said Calandrino, "but they are all pretty nearly black; wherefore, methinks, we were best to collect all the black stones that we see until we hit upon it: and so, let us be off, and lose no more time." "Nay, but," said Bruno, "wait a bit." And turning to Buffalmacco: "Methinks," quoth he, "that Calandrino says well: but I doubt this is not the time for such work, seeing that the sun is high, and his rays so flood the Mugnone as to dry all the stones; insomuch that stones will now show as white that in the morning, before the sun had dried them, would show as black: besides which, to-day being a working-day, there will be for one cause or another folk not a few about the Mugnone, who, seeing us, might guess what we were come for, and peradventure do the like themselves; whereby it might well be that they found the stone, and we might miss the trot by trying after the amble. Wherefore, so you agree, methinks we were best to go about it in the morning, when we shall be better able to distinguish the black stones from the white, and on a holiday, when there will be none to see us."

Buffalmacco's advice being approved by Bruno, Calandrino chimed in; and so 'twas arranged that they should all three go in quest of the stone on the following Sunday. So Calandrino, having besought his companions above all things to let never a soul in the world hear aught of the matter, for that it had been imparted to him in strict confidence, and having told them what he had heard touching the land of Bengodi, the truth of which he firmed with oaths, took leave of them; and they concerted their plan, while Calandrino impatiently expected the Sunday morning. Whereon, about dawn, he arose, and called them; and forth they issued by the Porta a San Gallo, and hied them to the Mugnone, and following its course, began their quest of the stone, Calandrino, as was natural, leading the way, and jumping lightly from rock to rock, and wherever he espied a black stone, stooping down, picking it up and putting it in the fold of his tunic, while his comrades followed, picking up a stone here and a stone there. Thus it was that Calandrino had not gone far, before, finding

that there was no more room in his tunic, he lifted the skirts of his gown, which was not cut after the fashion of Hamault, and gathering them under his leathern girdle and making them fast on every side, thus furnished himself with a fresh and capacious lap, which, however, taking no long time to fill, he made another lap out of his cloak, which in like manner he soon filled with stones. Wherefore, Bruno and Buffalmacco seeing that Calandrino was well laden, and that 'twas nigh upon breakfast time, and the moment for action come 'Where is Calandrino?' quoth Bruno to Buffalmacco. Whereto Buffalmacco who had Calandrino full in view, having first turned about and looked here, there, and everywhere, made answer

That wot not I but not so long ago he was just in front of us" 'Not so long ago, forsooth,' returned Bruno, "'tis my firm belief that at this very moment he is at breakfast at home, having left to us this wild-goose chase of black stones in the Mugnone. Marry quoth Buffalmacco, 'he did but serve us right so to trick us and leave, seeing that we were so silly as to believe him. Why who could have thought that any but we would have been so foolish as to believe that a stone of such rare virtue was to be found in the Mugnone?' Calandrino hearing their colloquy, forthwith imagined that he had the stone in his hand, and by its virtue though present, was invisible to them and overjoyed by such good fortune, would not say a word to undeceive them but determined to hie him home and accordingly faced about, and put himself in motion. Whereupon Ay! quoth Buffalmacco to Bruno, 'what are we about that we go not back too?' 'Go we then,' said Bruno but by God I swear that Calandrino shall never play me another such trick, and as to this, were I nigh him, as I have been all the morning I would teach him to remember it for a month or so such a reminder would I give him in the heel with this stone. And even as he spoke he threw back his arm and launched the stone against Calandrino's heel. Galled by the blow Calandrino gave a great hop and a slight gasp, but said nothing, and halted not. Then, picking out one of the stones that he had collected "Bruno," quoth Buffalmacco, see what a goodly stone I have here, would it might but catch Calandrino in the back, and forthwith he discharged it with main force upon the said back. And in short, suiting action to word, now in this way, now in that, they stoned him all the way up the Mugnone as far as the Porta a San Gallo

There they threw away the stones they had picked up, and tarried a while with the customs officers, who, being primed by them, had let Calandrino pass unchallenged, while their laughter knew no bounds.

So Calandrino, halting nowhere, betook him to his house, which was hard by the corner of the Macina. And so well did Fortune prosper the trick, that all the way by the stream and across the city there was never a soul that said a word to Calandrino, and indeed he encountered but few, for most folk were at breakfast. But no sooner was Calandrino thus gotten home with his stones, than it so happened that his good lady, Monna Tessa, showed her fair face at the stair's head, and catching sight of him, and being somewhat annoyed by his long delay, chid him, saying: "What the Devil brings thee here so late? Must breakfast wait thee until all other folk have had it?" Calandrino caught the words, and angered and mortified to find that he was not invisible, broke out with: "Alas! curst woman! so 'twas thou! Thou hast undone me: but, God's faith, I will pay thee out." Whereupon he was upstairs in a trice, and having discharged his great load of stones in a parlour, rushed with fell intent upon his wife, and laid hold of her by the hair, and threw her down at his feet, and beat and kicked her in every part of her person with all the force he had in his arms and legs, insomuch that he left never a hair of her head or bone of her body unscathed, and 'twas all in vain that she laid her palms together and crossed her fingers and cried for mercy.

Now Buffalmacco and Bruno, after making merry a while with the warders of the gate, had set off again at a leisurely pace, keeping some distance behind Calandrino. Arrived at his door, they heard the noise of the sound thrashing that he was giving his wife; and making as if they were but that very instant come upon the scene, they called him. Calandrino, flushed, all of a sweat, and out of breath, showed himself at the window and bade them come up. They, putting on a somewhat angry air, did so; and espied Calandrino sitting in the parlour, amid the stones which lay all about, untrussed, and puffing with the air of a man spent with exertion, while his lady lay in one of the corners, weeping bitterly, her hair all dishevelled, her clothes torn to shreds, and her face livid, bruised, and battered. So after surveying the room a while: "What means this, Calandrino?" quoth they. "Art thou

minded to build thee a wall, that we see so many stones about?" And then, as they received no answer, they continued: "And how 's this? How comes Monna Tessa in this plight? 'Twould seem thou hast given her a beating! What unheard-of doings are these?" What with the weight of the stones that he had carried, and the fury with which he had beaten his wife, and the mortification that he felt at the miscarriage of his enterprise, Calandrino was too spent to utter a word by way of reply. Wherefore in a menacing tone Buffalmacco began, again: "However out of sorts thou mayst have been, Calandrino, thou shouldst not have played us so scurvy a trick as thou hast. To take us with thee to the Mugnone in quest of this stone of rare virtue, and then, without so much as saying either God-speed or Devil-speed, to be off, and leave us there like a couple of gowks! We take it not a little unkindly, and rest assured that thou shalt never so fool us again." Whereto with an effort Calandrino replied: "Comrades, be not wroth with me 'tis not as you think. I, luckless wight! found the stone. Listen, and you will no longer doubt that I say sooth. When you began saying one to the other 'Where is Calandrino?' I was within ten paces of you, and marking that you came by without seeing me, I went before, and so, keeping ever a little ahead of you, I came hither." And then he told them the whole story of what they had said and done from beginning to end, and showed them his back and heel, how they had been mauled by the stones, after which "And I tell you," he went on, "that, laden though I was with all these stones, that you see here, never a word was said to me by the warders of the gate as I passed in, though you know how vexatious and grievous these warders are wont to make themselves in their determination to see everything, and, moreover, I met by the way several of my gossips and friends that are ever wont to greet me, and ask me to drink, and never a word said any of them to me, no, nor half a word either, but they passed me by as men that saw me not. But at last, being come home, I was met and seen by this devil of a woman, curses upon her, forasmuch as all things, as you know, lose their virtue in the presence of a woman, whereby I from being the most lucky am become the most luckless man in Florence and therefore I thrashed her as long as I could stir a hand, nor know I wherefore I forbear to sluice her veins for her, cursed be the hour that first I saw her, cursed be the hour that I brought her into the

# THE STORY OF TWO YOUNG MEN

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

Two young men ask counsel of Solomon the one, how he is to make himself beloved, the other how he is to reduce an unruly wife to order. The king bids the one to love and the other to go to the Bridge of Geese.

Now when the ladies had laughed their fill over the misfortunes of Biondello thus gaily the queen began. Observe we, lovesome ladies, the order of things with a sound mind, and we shall readily perceive that we women are one and all subjected by Nature and custom and law unto man, by him to be ruled and governed at his discretion, wherefore she, that would fain enjoy quietude and solace and comfort with the man to whom she belongs, ought not only to be chaste but lowly, patient, and obedient the which is the discreet wife's chief and most precious possession. And if the laws, which in all matters have regard unto the common weal, and use and wont or custom (call it what you will), a power very great and to be had in awe, should not suffice to school us thereto, yet abundantly clear is the witness of Nature, which has fashioned our frames delicate and sensitive, and our spirits timorous and fearful, and has decreed that our bodily strength shall be slight, our voices tunable, and our movements graceful, which qualities do all avouch that we have need of others' governance. And whoso has need of succour and governance ought in all reason to be obedient and submissive and reverent towards his governor. And whom have we to govern and succour us save men? 'Tis then our bounden duty to give men all honour and submit ourselves unto them from which rule if any deviate, I deem her most deserving not only of grave censure but of severe chastisement. Which reflections, albeit they are not new to me, I am now led to make by what but a little while ago Pampinea told us touching the perverse wife of Talano, on whom God bestowed that chastisement which the husband had omitted, and accordingly it jumps with my judgment that all such women as deviate from

the graciousness, kindness, and compliancy, which Nature and custom and law prescribe, merit, as I said, stern and severe chastisement. Wherefore, as a salutary medicine for the healing of those of us who may be afflicted with this disease, I am minded to relate to you that which was once delivered by Solomon by way of counsel in such a case. Which let none that stands not in need of such physic deem to be meant for her, albeit a proverb is current among men; to wit:

Good steed, bad steed, alike need the rowel's prick,  
Good wife, bad wife, alike demand the stick.

Which whoso should construe as a merry conceit would find you all ready enough to acknowledge its truth. But even in its moral significance I say that it ought to command assent. For women are all by nature apt to be swayed and to fall; and therefore, for the correction of the wrong-doing of such as transgress the bounds assigned to them, there is need of the stick punitive; and also for the maintenance of virtue in others, that they transgress not these appointed bounds, there is need of the stick auxiliary and deterrent. However, to cut short this preaching, and to come to that which I purpose to tell you, I say:

That the bruit of the incomparable renown of the prodigious wisdom of Solomon, as also of the exceeding great liberality with which he accorded proof thereof to all that craved such assurance, being gone forth over well-nigh all the earth, many from divers parts were wont to resort to him for counsel in matters of most pressing and arduous importance; among whom was a young man, Melisso by name, a very wealthy nobleman, who was, as had been his fathers before him, of Lazistan, and there dwelt. And as Melisso fared toward Jerusalem, on his departure from Antioch he fell in with another young man, Giosefo by name, who was going the same way, and with whom, after the manner of travellers, he entered into converse. Melisso, having learned from Giosefo, who and whence he was, asked him whither he went, and on what errand: whereupon Giosefo made an answer that he was going to seek counsel of Solomon, how he should deal with his wife, who had not her match among women for unruliness and perversity, insomuch that neither entreaties nor blandishments nor aught else availed him to bring her to a better frame. And thereupon he in like manner asked Melisso whence he was, and whither he was bound, and on what errand: whereto: "Of Lazistan, I," replied Melisso,

' and like thyself in evil plight, for albeit I am wealthy and spend my substance freely in hospitably entertaining and honourably entreating my fellow-citizens, yet for all that, passing strange though it be to think upon, I find never a soul to love me, and therefore I am bound to the selfsame place as thou to be advised how it may come to pass that I be beloved

So the two men fared on together, and being arrived at Jerusalem, were, by the good offices of one of Solomon's barons, ushered into his presence, and Melisso having briefly laid his case before the king was answered in one word 'Love' Which said, Melisso was forthwith dismissed and Giosefo discovered the reason of his coming To whom Solomon made no answer but 'Get thee to the Bridge of Geese' Whereupon Giosefo was likewise promptly ushered out of the king's presence and finding Melisso awaiting him, told him what manner of answer he had gotten. Which utterances of the king the two men pondered, but finding therein nought that was helpful or relevant to their need, they doubted the king had but mocked them and set forth upon their homeward journey

Now when they had been some days on the road, they came to a river which was spanned by a fine bridge, and a great caravan of sumpter mules and horses being about to cross, they must needs tarry, until the caravan had passed by The more part of which had done so, when it chanced that a mule turned sulky, as we know they will not seldom do, and stood stock still wherefore a muleteer took a stick and fell a beating the mule therewith albeit at first with no great vigour, to urge the mule forward The mule however, swerving, now to this, now to the other side of the bridge, and sometimes facing about, utterly refused to go forward Whereat the muleteer, wroth beyond measure, fell a belabouring him with the stick now on the head, now on the flanks, and anon on the croup, never so lustily but all to no purpose Which caused Melisso and Giosefo oft times to say to him 'How now, cuttiff? What is this thou doest? Wouldst kill the beast? Why not try if thou canst manage him kindly and gently? He would start sooner so than for this cudgelling of thine' To whom

'You know your horses,' replied the muleteer, "and I know my mule leave me to deal with him' Which said, he resumed his cudgelling of the mule, and laid about him on this side and on that to such purpose that he started him, and so the

honours of the day rested with the muleteer. Now, as the two young men were leaving the bridge behind them, Giosefo asked a good young man that sate at its head what the bridge was called, and was answered: "Sir, 'tis called the Bridge of Geese." Which Giosefo no sooner heard than he called to mind Solomon's words, and turning to Melisso: "Now, comrade, I warrant thee I may yet find Solomon's counsel sound and good, for that I knew not how to beat my wife is abundantly clear to me; and this muleteer has shown me what I have to do."

Now some days afterwards they arrived at Antioch, where Giosefo prevailed upon Melisso to tarry with him and rest a day or two; and meeting with but a sorry welcome on the part of his wife, he told her to take her orders as to supper from Melisso, who, seeing that such was Giosefo's will, briefly gave her his instructions; which the lady, as had been her wont, not only did not obey, but contravened in almost every particular. Which Giosefo marking: "Wast thou not told," quoth he angrily, "after what fashion thou wast to order the supper?" Whereto: "Sol" replied the lady haughtily: "what means this? If thou hast a mind to sup, why take not thy supper? No matter what I was told, 'tis thus I saw fit to order it. If it like thee, so be it: if not, 'tis thine affair." Melisso heard the lady with surprise and inward disapprobation: Giosefo retorted: "Ay, wife, thou art still as thou wast used to be; but I will make thee mend thy manners." Then, turning to Melisso: "Friend," quoth he, "thou wilt soon prove the worth of Solomon's counsel: but, prithee, let it not irk thee to look on, and deem that what I shall do is but done in sport; and if thou shouldst be disposed to stand in my way, bear in mind how we were answered by the muleteer, when we pitied his mule." "I am in thy house," replied Melisso, "and thy pleasure is to me law."

Thereupon Giosefo took a stout cudgel cut from an oak sapling, and hied him into the room whither the lady had withdrawn from the table in high dudgeon, seized her by the hair, threw her on to the floor at his feet, and fell a-beating her amain with the cudgel. The lady at first uttered a shriek or two, from which she passed to threats; but seeing that, for all that, Giosefo slackened not, by the time she was thoroughly well thrashed, she began to cry him mercy, imploring him not to kill her, and adding that henceforth his will should be to her for law. But still Giosefo gave not over, but with ever fresh

fury dealt her mighty swinging blows, now about the ribs, now on the haunches, now over the shoulders, nor had he done with the fair lady, until, in short, he had left never a bone or other part of her person whole, and he was fairly spent. Then, returning to Melisso "To-morrow," quoth he, "we shall see whether 'Get thee to the Bridge of Geese' will prove to have been sound advice or no." And so, having rested a while, and then washed his hands, he supped with Melisso. With great pain the poor lady got upon her feet and laid herself on her bed, and having there taken such rest as she might, rose betimes on the morrow, and craved to know of Gioselo what he was minded to have to breakfast. Gioselo, laughing with Melisso over the message, gave her his directions, and when in due time they came to breakfast, they found everything excellently ordered according as it had been commanded for which cause the counsel, which they had at first failed to understand, now received their highest commendation.

Some few days later Melisso, having taken leave of Gioselo, went home, and told a wise man the counsel he had gotten from Solomon. Whereupon "And no truer or sounder advice could he have given thee," quoth the sage "thou knowest that thou lovest never a soul, and that the honours thou payest and the services thou tenderest to others are not prompted by love of them but by love of display. Love, then, as Solomon bade thee, and thou shalt be loved." On such wise was the unruly chastised, and the young man, learning to love, was beloved.

# THE FALCON

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

Federigo degli Alberighi loves and is not loved in return: he wastes his substance by lavishness until nought is left but a single falcon, which, his lady being come to see him at his house, he gives her to eat: she, knowing his case, changes her mind, takes him to husband and makes him rich.

THE queen, being ware that besides herself only Dioneo (by virtue of his privilege) was left to speak, said with gladsome mien: 'Tis now for me to take up my parable; which, dearest ladies, I will do with a story like in some degree to the foregoing, and that, not only that you may know how potent are your charms to sway the gentle heart, but that you may also learn how upon fitting occasions to make bestowal of your guerdons of your own accord, instead of always waiting for the guidance of Fortune, which most times, not wisely, but without rule or measure, scatters her gifts.

You are then to know, that Coppo di Borghese Domenichi, a man that in our day was, and perchance still is, had in respect and great reverence in our city, being not only by reason of his noble lineage, but, and yet more, for manners and merit most illustrious and worthy of eternal renown, was in his old age not seldom wont to amuse himself by discoursing of things past with his neighbours and other folk; wherein he had not his match for accuracy and compass of memory and concinnity of speech. Among other good stories, he would tell, how that there was of yore in Florence a gallant named Federigo di Messer Filippo Alberighi, who for feats of arms and courtesy had not his peer in Tuscany; who, as is the common lot of gentlemen, became enamoured of a lady named Monna Giovanna, who in her day held rank among the fairest and most elegant ladies of Florence; to gain whose love he jousted, tilted, gave entertainments, scattered largess, and in short set no bounds to his expenditure. However the lady, no less virtuous than fair, cared not a jot for what he did for her sake, nor yet for him.

Spending thus greatly beyond his means, and making nothing, Federigo could hardly fail to come to lack, and was at length reduced to such poverty that he had nothing left but a little estate, on the rents of which he lived very straitly, and a single falcon, the best in the world. The estate was at Campi, and thither, deeming it no longer possible for him to live in the city as he desired, he repaired, more in love than ever before, and there in complete seclusion, diverting himself with hawking, he bore his poverty as patiently as he might.

Now, Federigo being thus reduced to extreme poverty, it so happened that one day Monna Giovanna's husband, who was very rich, fell ill, and, seeing that he was nearing his end, made his will, whereby he left his estate to his son, who was now growing up and in the event of his death without lawful heir named Monna Giovanna, whom he dearly loved, heir in his stead, and having made these dispositions he died.

Monna Giovanna, being thus left a widow, did as our ladies are wont, and repaired in the summer to one of her estates in the country which lay very near to that of Federigo. And so it befell that the urchin began to make friends with Federigo, and to show a fondness for hawks and dogs, and having seen Federigo's falcon fly not a few times, took a singular fancy to him, and greatly longed to have him for his own, but still did not dare to ask him of Federigo, knowing that Federigo prized him so much. So the matter stood when by chance the boy fell sick, whereby the mother was sore distressed, for he was her only son, and she loved him as much as might be, insomuch that all day long she was beside him, and ceased not to comfort him, and again and again asked him if there were aught that he wished for, imploring him to say the word, and, if it might by any means be had she would assuredly do her utmost to procure it for him. Thus repeatedly exhorted, the boy said:

"Mother mine, do but get me Federigo's falcon, and I doubt not I shall soon be well." Whereupon the lady was silent a while bethinking her what she should do. She knew that Federigo had long loved her, and had never had so much as a single kind look from her wherefore she said to herself: How can I send or go to beg of him this falcon, which by what I hear is the best that ever flew, and moreover is his sole comfort? And how could I be so unfeeling as to seek to deprive a gentleman of the one solace that is now left him? And so, albeit she very well knew that she might have the falcon for the

asking, she was perplexed, and knew not what to say, and gave her son no answer. At length, however, the love she bore the boy carried the day, and she made up her mind, for his contentment, come what might, not to send, but to go herself and fetch him the falcon. So: "Be of good cheer, my son," she said, "and doubt not thou wilt soon be well; for I promise thee that the very first thing that I shall do to-morrow morning will be to go and fetch thee the falcon." Whereat the child was so pleased that he began to mend that very day.

On the morrow the lady, as if for pleasure, hied her with another lady to Federigo's little house, and asked to see him. 'Twas still, as for some days past, no weather for hawking, and Federigo was in his garden, busy about some small matters which needed to be set right there. When he heard that Monna Giovanna was at the door, asking to see him, he was not a little surprised and pleased, and hied him to her with all speed. As soon as she saw him, she came forward to meet him with womanly grace, and having received his respectful salutation, said to him: "Good morrow, Federigo," and continued: "I am come to requite thee for what thou hast lost by loving me more than thou shouldst: which compensation is this, that I and this lady that accompanies me will breakfast with thee without ceremony this morning." "Madam," Federigo replied with all humility, "I mind not ever to have lost aught by loving you, but rather to have been so much profited that, if I ever deserved well in aught, 'twas to your merit that I owed it, and to the love that I bore you. And of a surety had I still as much to spend as I have spent in the past, I should not prize it so much as this visit you so frankly pay me, come as you are to one who can afford you but a sorry sort of hospitality." Which said, with some confusion, he bade her welcome to his house, and then led her into his garden, where, having none else to present to her by way of companion, he said: "Madam, as there is none other here, this good woman, wife of this husbandman, will bear you company, while I go to have the table set." Now, albeit his poverty was extreme, yet he had not known as yet how sore was the need to which his extravagance had reduced him; but this morning 'twas brought home to him, for that he could find nought wherewith to do honour to the lady, for love of whom he had done the honours of his house to men without number: wherefore, distressed beyond measure, and inwardly cursing his evil fortune, he sped hither and thither

like one beside himself but never a coin found he, nor yet aught to pledge. Meanwhile it grew late, and sorely he longed that the lady might not leave his house altogether unhonoured, and yet to crave help of his own husbandman was more than his pride could brook. In these desperate straits his glance happened to fall on his brave falcon on his perch in his little parlour. And so as a last resource he took him and finding him plump, deemed that he would make a dish meet for such a lady. Wherefore without thinking twice about it, he wrung the bird's neck and caused his maid forthwith pluck him and set him on a spit and roast him carefully, and having still some spotless table linen he had the table laid therewith and with a cheerful countenance hied him back to his lady in the garden and told her that such breakfast as he could give her was ready. So the lady and her companion rose and came to table and there, with Federigo who waited on them most faithfully ate the brave falcon knowing not what they ate.

When they were risen from table, and had dallied a while in gay converse with him the lady deemed it time to tell the reason of her visit wherefore graciously addressing Federigo, thus began she. Federigo by what thou rememberest of thy past life and my virtue which perchance thou hast deemed harshness and cruelty I doubt not thou must marvel at my presumption when thou hearest the main purpose of my visit, but if thou hadst sons or hadst had them so that thou mightest know the full force of the love that is borne them, I should make no doubt that thou wouldst hold me in part excused. Nor, having a son may I for that thou hast none, claim exemption from the laws to which all other mothers are subject, and being thus bound to own their sway, I must, though fain were I not and though 'tis neither meet nor right, crave of thee that which I know thou dost of all things and with justice prize most highly seeing that this extremity of thy adverse fortune has left thee nought else wherewith to delight, divert and console thee which gift is no other than thy falcon, on which my boy has so set his heart that if I bring him it not, I fear lest he grow so much worse of the malady that he has that thereby it may come to pass that I lose him. And so, not for the love which thou dost bear me, and which may nowise bind thee, but for that nobleness of temper, whereof in courtesy more conspicuously than in aught else thou hast given proof, I implore thee that thou be pleased to give me the bird that thereby I may say

that I have kept my son alive, and thus made him for aye thy debtor."

No sooner had Federigo apprehended what the lady wanted, than, for grief that 'twas not in his power to serve her, because he had given her the falcon to eat, he fell a-weeping in her presence, before he could so much as utter a word. At first the lady supposed that 'twas only because he was loath to part with the brave falcon that he wept, and as good as made up her mind that he would refuse her: however, she awaited with patience Federigo's answer, which was on this wise: "Madam, since it pleased God that I should set my affections upon you there have been matters not a few, in which to my sorrow I have deemed Fortune adverse to me; but they have all been trifles in comparison of the trick that she now plays me: the which I shall never forgive her, seeing that you are come here to my poor house, where, while I was rich, you deigned not to come, and ask a trifling favour of me, which she has put it out of my power to grant: how 'tis so, I will briefly tell you. When I learned that you, of your grace, were minded to breakfast with me, having respect to your high dignity and desert, I deemed it due and seemly that in your honour I should regale you, to the best of my power, with fare of a more excellent quality than is commonly set before others; and, calling to mind the falcon which you now ask of me, and his excellence, I judged him meet food for you, and so you have had him roasted on the trencher this morning; and well indeed I thought I had bestowed him; but, as now I see that you would fain have had him in another guise, so mortified am I that I am not able to serve you, that I doubt I shall never know peace of mind more." In witness whereof he had the feathers and feet and beak of the bird brought in and laid before her.

The first thing the lady did, when she had heard Federigo's story, and seen the relics of the bird, was to chide him that he had killed so fine a falcon to furnish a woman with a breakfast; after which the magnanimity of her host, which poverty had been and was powerless to impair, elicited no small share of inward commendation. Then, frustrate of her hope of possessing the falcon, and doubting of her son's recovery, she took her leave with the heaviest of hearts, and hied her back to the boy: who, whether for fretting, that he might not have the falcon, or by the unaided energy of his disorder, departed this life not many days after, to the exceeding great grief of

his mother For a while she would do nought but weep and bitterly bewail herself, but being still young, and left very wealthy, she was often urged by her brothers to marry again, and though she would rather have not done so, yet being importuned, and remembering Federigo's high desert, and the magnificent generosity with which he had finally killed his falcon to do her honour, she said to her brothers "Gladly, with your consent, would I remain a widow, but if you will not be satisfied except I take a husband rest assured that none other will I ever take save Federigo degli Alberghis" Whereupon her brothers derided her, saying "Foolish woman, what is't thou sayest? How shouldst thou want Federigo, who has not a thing in the world?" To whom she answered "My brothers, well wot I that tis as you say, but I had rather have a man without wealth than wealth without a man" The brothers, perceiving that her mind was made up, and knowing Federigo for a good man and true, poor though he was, gave her to him with all her wealth And so Federigo, being mated with such a wife, and one that he had so much loved, and being very wealthy to boot, lived happily, keeping more exact accounts, to the end of his days

## GALGANO'S LOVE

GIOVANNI FIORENTINO

HAVING agreed upon the manner in which they were to meet each other in the convent parlour, as we have already stated, the two lovers were true to the appointed hour. With mutual pleasure and congratulations, they seated themselves at each other's side, when Friar Aurette, in the following words, began: "It is now my intention, my own Saturnina, to treat you with a little love-tale, founded on some incidents which really occurred, not very long ago, in Sienna. There resided there a noble youth of the name of Galgano, who besides his birth and riches, was extremely clever, valiant, and affable, qualities which won him the regard of all ranks of people in the place. But I am very sorry to add that, attracted by the beauty of a Siennese lady, no other, you must know, than the fair Minoccia, wedded to our noble cavalier, Messer Stricca (though I beg this may go no farther), our young friend unfortunately, and too late, fell passionately in love with her.

"So violently enamoured did he shortly become, that he purloined her glove, which he wore with her favourite colours wherever he went; at tilts and tourneys, at rich feasts and festivals, all of which he was proud to hold in honour of his love: yet all these failed to render him agreeable to the lady, a circumstance that caused our poor friend Galgano no little pain and perplexity. A prey to the excessive cruelty and indifference of one, dearer to him than his own life, who neither noticed nor listened to him, he still followed her like her shadow, contriving to be near her at every party, whether a bridal or a christening, a funeral or a play. Long and vainly, with love messages after love messages, and presents after presents, did he sue; but never would the noble lady deign to receive or listen to them for a moment, ever bearing herself more reserved and harshly, as he more earnestly pressed the ardour of his suit.

"It was thus his fate to remain subject to this very irksome and overwhelming passion, until wearied out, at length, he would

break into words of grief and bitterness against his 'bosom's lord — 'Alas! dread master of my destiny,' he would say, 'O Love! can you behold me, thus wasting my very soul away, ever loving, but never beloved again! See to it, dread lord, that you are not, in so doing, offending against your own laws!' And so, unhappily dwelling upon the lady's cruelty, he seemed fast verging upon despair, then again humbly resigning himself to the yoke he bore, he resolved to await some interval of grace, watching, however vainly, for some occasion of rendering himself more pleasing to the object he adored.

Now it happened that Messer Stricca and his consort went to pass some days at their country seat near Sienna, and it was not long before the lovesick Galgano was observed to cross their route, to hang upon their skirts, and to pass along the same way, always with a hawk upon his hand, as if violently set upon bird hunting. Often, indeed he passed so close to the villa where the lady dwelt, that one day being seen by Messer Stricca, who recognized him he was very familiarly entreated to afford them the pleasure of his company, 'and I hope,' added Messer Stricca that you will stay the evening with us.' Thanking his friend very kindly for the invitation, Galgano, strange to say at the same time begged to be held excused, pleading another appointment which he believed—he was sorry—he was obliged to keep. Then, added Messer Stricca, 'at least step in, and take some little refreshment' to which the only reply returned was 'A thousand thanks, and farewell, Messer Stricca, for I am in haste.' The moment the latter had turned his back our poor lover began to upbraid himself bitterly for not availing himself of the invitation, exclaiming 'What a wretch am I not to accept such an offer as this! I should at least have seen her—her whom from my soul I cannot help loving beyond all else in the world.'

As he thus went, meditating upon the same subject, along his solitary way, it chanced that he sprung a large jay, on which he instantly gave his hawk the wing, which pursuing its quarry into Messer Stricca's gardens, and there striking true, the ensuing struggle took place. Hearing the hawk's cry, both he and his lady ran towards the garden balcony, in time to see, and were surprised at the skill and boldness of the bird in seizing and bringing down its game. Not in the least aware of the truth the lady inquired of her husband, to whom the bird belonged? 'Mark the hawk,' replied M. Stricca, 'it does its

work well; it resembles its master, who is one of the handsomest and most accomplished young men in Sienna, and a very excellent young fellow, too;—yes, it does well.’

“‘And who may that be?’ said his wife, with a careless air. ‘Who,’ returned he, ‘but the noble Galgano? the same, love, who just now passed by. I wished he would have come in to sup with us; but he would not. He is certainly one of the finest and best-tempered men I ever saw.’ And so saying, he rose from the window, and they went to supper. Galgano, in the meanwhile, having given his hawk the call, quietly pursued his way; but the praises lavished upon him by her husband made an impression upon the lady’s mind, such as the whole of his previous solicitations had failed to produce. However strange, she dwelt upon them long and tenderly. It happened that about this very time, Messer Stricca was chosen ambassador from the Siennese to the people of Perugia, and setting out in all haste, he was compelled to take a sudden leave of his lady. I am sorry to have to observe that the moment the cavalcade was gone by, recalling the idea of her noble lover, the lady likewise dispatched an embassy to our young friend, entreating him, after the example of her husband, to favour her with his company in the evening. No longer venturing to refuse, he sent a grateful answer back, that he would very willingly attend. And having heard tidings of Messer Stricca’s departure for Perugia, he set out at a favourable hour in the evening, and speedily arrived at the house of the lady to whom he had been so long and so vainly attached.

“Checking his steed in full career, he threw himself off, and the next moment found himself in her presence, falling at her feet, and saluting her with the most respectful and graceful carriage. She took him joyously by the hand, bidding him a thousand tender welcomes, and setting before him the choicest fruits and refreshments of the season. Then inviting him to be seated, he was served with the greatest variety and splendour; and more delicious than all, the bright lady herself presided there, no longer frowning and turning away, when he began to breathe the story of his love and sufferings into her ear. Delighted and surprised beyond his proudest hopes, Galgano was profuse in his expressions of gratitude and regard, though he could not quite conceal his wonder at this happy and unexpected change; entreating, at length, as a particular favour, that she would deign to acquaint him with its blessed cause. ‘That will I do

soon,' replied the glowing beauty, 'I will tell you every word, and therefore did I send for you', and she looked into his face with a serene and pure, yet somewhat mournful countenance. 'Indeed,' returned her lover, a little perplexed, 'words can never tell half of what I felt, dear lady, when I heard you had this morning sent for me, after having desired and followed you for so long a time in vain.' 'Listen to me, and I will tell you, Gaigano, but first sit a little nearer to me, for, alas! I love you. A few days ago, you know, you passed near our house when hawking, and my husband told me that he saw you, and invited you in to supper, but you would not come. At that moment your hawk sprang and pursued its prey, when seeing the noble bird make such a gallant fight, I inquired to whom it belonged, and my husband replied "To whom should it belong, but to the most excellent young man in Sienna?" and that it did well to resemble you, as he had never met a more pleasing and accomplished gentleman.' 'Did he?—did he say that?' interrupted her lover. 'He did, indeed, and much more, praising you to me over and over, until hearing it, and knowing the tenderness you have long borne me, I could not resist the temptation of sending for you hither' and, half blushes, half tears, she confessed that he was no longer indifferent to her, and that such was the occasion of it. 'Can the whole of this be true?' exclaimed Gaigano. 'Alas! too true,' she replied. 'I know not how it is, but I wish he had not praised you so.' After struggling with himself a few moments, the unhappy lover withdrew his hand from hers, saying 'Now God forbid that I should do the least wrong to one who has so nobly expressed himself, and who has ever shown so much kindness and courtesy to me.' Then suddenly rising, as with an effort, from his seat, he took a gentle farewell of the lady, not without some tears shed on both sides, both loving, yet respecting each other. Never afterwards did this noble youth allude to the affair in the slightest way, but always treated Messer Stricca with the utmost regard and reverence during his acquaintance with the family."

## THE MILLER

FRANCO SACCHETTI

MESSER BERNABO, Lord of Milan, once bestowed a handsome reward upon a certain miller, for the somewhat singular reason of having received from the shrewd artificer some very witty and caustic replies. Our said governor, who bore a most cruel and implacable disposition towards all kind of offenders, nevertheless possessed the art of tempering his ferocity, so as to give it an air of real justice.

The case he had here in hand was that of a wealthy abbot, who had been fined by the governor in four florins, for his negligence in the education of two mastiff whelps, entrusted to his spiritual direction, but which had turned out somewhat too cruel and quarrelsome. The covetous Father upon this cried out for mercy, to which the governor merely replied, that he must without fail pay the fine, unless he had the wit to give a satisfactory explanation of four points he should propose to him; which were these: "What distance, Father, do you apprehend it is from hence to heaven? What quantity of water is there in the sea? What do people do in the infernal regions? And fourthly, What may be the value of my person?" The good Father hung his head on one side in a reflecting attitude for some time, but at length only uttered a deep sigh, perfectly at a loss what to do. To gain time, however, he begged he might be allowed to return home, to consider these important questions somewhat more maturely. His Excellency would only grant him a single day, and, moreover, made him enter into good security for his speedy return. The priest, in a doleful mood, then measured his steps back again to his abbey, blowing like a broken-winded steed. On his arrival, the first person he met was the jolly miller, who observing his melancholy air, inquired into the nature of his distress and the exhausted state of his breathing. "I may well be out of breath," he exclaimed, "when His Excellency has set me no less than four knotty points to solve, which neither the wisdom of Solomon, nor that of the Stagyrite himself, would have been able to unriddle."

"Very likely," returned the miller, "but if you will trust to me, I will bring you through the scrape at once." "The Lord grant you could," said the poor abbot, with a pious ejaculation.

"Yes and the Lord and all the saints in heaven will, if you will only let them, that I think I may fairly say."

"If you were really in earnest, and could be as good as your word, Mr. Miller, you might afterwards count upon me in every thing during the whole of your life." "That is saying a good deal too," returned the miller, "but I will give it full credit for the sake of your cloth." "To be sure," said the reverend Father, "but how do you propose to get me off the horns of this dilemma? that is the question." "How!" exclaimed the miller in a scornful tone. "Why, I shall shave my beard, and take your hood and cloak, and present myself to-morrow morning in your place. Trust me, I will answer His Excellency's questions, whatever they may be, and he shall never find out the difference between us, except it be from the difference in our wits." "The Lord bless thee for an impudent varlet," cried the honest Father, "as I hope for salvation, I verily believe thou wilt bring me through." Get thee gone, and rely upon thy impudence. It will appear a thousand years until I hear the result. Having disguised himself in the good abbot's suit, our knight of the white hat accordingly set out for the city early the ensuing day and soon arriving at His Excellency's palace, knocked pretty loudly at the door, telling the porter he had brought the requisite answers for his master, which he must deliver by word of mouth.

Hearing who he was, His Excellency ordered the abbot to be brought straightway into his presence, wondering how he had already prepared himself for his task. The false friar, with reverence due, accosted His Excellency with a sidling air having admirably metamorphosed his physiognomy, and imitating the abbot's voice to perfection. With very little ceremony he was required to repeat what he had learned in the way of explanation of the four points in dispute. Expressing his readiness, he was first requested to point out the exact distance between earth and heaven.

"Having considered the matter very maturely," said the miller, "I find there are just thirty six millions eight hundred and fifty four miles, seventy two yards, and twenty two feet." "You must have measured it very exactly," exclaimed His Excellency, "but how will you prove it is correct?" "How!"

retorted the bold miller: "As such matters are always proved; let Your Excellency refer it to arbitration, and if it should not be found upon a second measurement exactly what I have stated, hang me up by the neck upon the next tree. It seems you want to know next, how much water there is contained in the sea? Now this has cost me a good deal of trouble, for it would neither stand still while I measured it, nor stop from receiving its tributary streams. Yet I have nevertheless compassed the difficulty, and find there are just twenty-five thousand nine hundred and eighty-two millions of vats, seven barrels, seven bottles, and two glasses of water in the sea." "But how have you learned that, Mr. Abbot?" inquired the governor. "Why, if you do not like to believe me," retorted the other, "order the proper vessels to be prepared, and measure it again. If you do not find just as much as I have told you, quarter me alive without any mercy. The third question, I think, you want resolved, is how people contrive to employ themselves in the world below? To this I answer, they do much as we do here; they cut and hack one another until they are weary of such sport; they persecute and they hang one another." "But what are your reasons for this opinion?" "Do you ask me for reasons?" returned the miller. "Why, I spoke with the very man who returned from a tour there, the same from whom the divine Florentine received his account of the infernal government, and the whole of its civil and judicial polity; but the traveller, I believe, is now dead, and went back again. And if you are not satisfied with my word for the truth of it, I refer you to him, and would advise you to send and see.

"The fourth and last of your questions, concerns the worth of your own respected person; and I tell you it amounts to neither more nor less than two shillings and fivepence."

Upon hearing this, Messer Bernabo rose in a furious passion, crying: "Villain, I will make you eat your words: how, you rogue abbot, am I worth no more than an old rusty pan?"

The poor miller, beginning to quake in his shoes, entreated in a somewhat milder tone that His Excellency would but deign to hear his reasons, saying: "You are aware, my honoured lord, that our great Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, was sold for only thirty pence, and surely you will not be offended at being rated one mark lower." The moment he heard this answer, the governor was convinced he had no longer the honest abbot to deal with, and eyeing him more narrowly, he perceived him to

be of larger dimensions both in body and mind, than his friend the honest abbot could boast.

'You say very true' he exclaimed, 'but you are not the abbot friend at least I have you there' The poor miller, fearing upon this, that it was all over with him, fell piteously upon his knees with uplifted hands, confessing it was true, he was only the good Father's grinder of corn. He then proceeded to explain the occasion of his appearance in this disguise, for the mere purpose of amusing all parties, but of giving offence to none.

'Then by all the saints in heaven,' cried Messer Bernabo, 'I swear since he has made thee abbot, an abbot thou shalt remain. By this sword I confirm his decree and henceforth he shall serve thee abbot, as thine honest miller, and cheat thee of thy flour. The proceeds of the monastery are thine, those of the mill shall be his, and this sentence he strictly enforced.'

# MARIOTTO

MASSUCCIO SALERNITANO

THE following story was lately told by a Siennese gentleman to a party of lovely ladies, the relater being a character of no inconsiderable authority in the state. There was a young man of good family and accomplished manners, whose name was Mariotto Magnanelli, resident in Sienna, who had become deeply attached to a beautiful maiden, daughter of a very respectable citizen of the Saraceni family, belonging to the same place. After long and assiduous attentions, the youth had succeeded in gaining the young lady's affections, inspiring her with a passion scarcely less ardent than his own. But their eyes alone were permitted to avow the strength of those feelings, which overwhelmed the hearts of both, seeking vainly and anxiously for some happy event which might unite them never more to part. As discreet as beautiful, the young creature, disappointed in the consent of her friends, was prevailed on to yield her hand to him in secret, as the only means left of averting the broken-heartedness of separation, and securing the enjoyment of their wishes. An Augustin friar united their hands, bound over to secrecy by the youth with no slight bribes. Their ensuing days were too delicious long to last. Fortune became envious of their happiness; for Mariotto, in a quarrel with another noble citizen, which from words proceeded to blows, was unlucky enough to wound his adversary mortally, and, to save his own life, was compelled to secrete himself, and to fly.

The court of Sienna, after instituting the strictest search, condemned the offender to perpetual banishment. The alarm, the grief, the tears of these young and inexperienced beings, thus rudely awakened out of their dream of life's sweetest joys, can be conceived only by those who, with similar feelings, have bade each other an eternal farewell; but cannot be described. Long and bitter was their parting; entranced in sorrow they lay sobbing in each other's arms; they struggled to part; but they

caught each other's eyes, and again rushed back to embrace, when the fair bride bowed her head upon her lover's breast, and became lost even to her despair. Their grief having exhausted itself, he flattered her with hopes of returning to his country and his love, that though he left Italy, he should find a home in Alexandria, with his uncle, a wealthy and reputable merchant, whence he assured her he would write to her, and adopt such measures that they should not long remain divided, and thus, still shedding tears they tore themselves away from each other. Immediately before he left his native shore, Mariotto took his brother aside, and acquainting him with the whole affair, earnestly recommended his forsaken bride to his care, entreating to hear from him as often as possible, with the minutest accounts of everything that might befall her, after which he went on board and the ship set sail. Being received by his uncle with the most kind and joyous welcome, the exile soon made him acquainted with the history of his unhappy adventures. Listening with the utmost commiseration to the poor youth's story, the merchant instead of vainly reproaching him for his past errors with equal gentleness and prudence endeavoured to console and flatter him with hopes of future reconciliation with the families he had offended, though he did not pretend to disguise his fears on the delicacy of his situation, and the necessity for the strictest caution in his proceedings. He then entrusted to him some of his mercantile affairs, entertaining him in his own house though not without much secret suffering on the part of the young man and many bitter tears shed by him when alone in spite of the letters he from time to time received from his deserted bride or from his brother, the only happiness he now possessed. In the meanwhile, however, the father of Giannozza had been frequently solicited to bestow his daughter's hand on various suitors for her love, and though numbers had been refused, such flattering proposals were at length made, that the poor girl had no longer any colour of excuse. In this wretched state of torture and suspense, death itself seemed to be far preferable to the life she endured, and finding at last that there appeared no hope of her dear husband's return, and that to divulge the real truth would only be the ruin of both, a thought struck her, and she resolved, at every hazard both of life and reputation, however dreadful, to rescue herself from her impending fate. Inspired with a noble resolution she signified her obedience to her father's pleasure. She then dispatched

a message for the monk, who had been the cause of all their sorrow in first uniting their hands, and secretly revealing her intentions, she besought his assistance in promoting her fixed resolve. He listened to her with surprise, and as is usual with his Order, evinced some degree of timidity and indecision; nor was it until he had swallowed a cordial to restore his flagging spirits, and beheld the glittering bait, that he could be persuaded to enter into her views. When he had heard the extremity to which she was reduced, the friar, as time pressed, hastened in obedience to her orders to prepare a certain drug, the power of which, when mixed with water, was sufficient to produce a sleep deep and inanimate as death, which would continue during three days, and this he immediately dispatched to the courageous and devoted wife. As soon as she had received it, she sat down and wrote to her husband a full account of her intentions, with regard to the manner in which she thus fearfully proposed, with the aid of the friar, to rejoin him. Then joyfully seizing the cup, she drank off the whole, and, shortly feeling a deep stupor stealing over her, she fell half unconsciously on her bed, as if she had breathed her last.

Her maidens coming into her chamber, with wild cries announced some fearful event, when her father, followed by some of his guests, burst into the room, and beheld his only and cherished child lifeless before his eyes. In vain were the physicians called in: after fruitless efforts to restore her, it was agreed by all, that she had fallen a victim to a sudden spasmodic affection of the stomach. She remained the whole of that day and the ensuing night in the same state, without showing the least sign of life. The next, to the infinite grief of her parents and friends, no less than of numbers of the Siennese people, she was interred with the most splendid rites and ceremonies in a grand vault in the church of St. Augustine. But about the hour of midnight, she was removed from this living tomb by the venerable friar and one of his companions, and laid, according to the concerted plan, in his own chamber. The hour being come when the heavy drug was to lose its influence, she was with some difficulty restored by the trembling friar to life; and, awakening as from a dream, in three days she was enabled to set out on her meditated journey to meet one for whom she had perilled so much. In the disguise of a monk she reached the port of Pisa, whence a convoy of ships was about to sail, which touched at Alexandria; and here she embarked. But driven

back by contrary winds and other casualties, the vessels were compelled to seek port and to refit, being in this manner detained many months at sea. Gargano, the brother of the youthful husband, had, in the meanwhile, written to him according to his promise a particular account of everything relating to his beloved wife and from this source had the unfortunate Manotto received the overwhelming tidings of her sudden death. The minutest incidents were mentioned of the time and manner of her interment, and how her aged father, in a short time, had followed her to the tomb. Unhappily, these letters were received before those sent by his dear Giannozza, unfolding her secret intentions, arrived as if fortune had now utterly abandoned those on whom she for a moment smiled, these happy tidings fell a prey to corsairs while the contrary ones reached their destination overwhelming the young lover with unequalled sorrow and despair. In vain did his uncle offer him every consolation in vain did he himself attempt to struggle with his grief, and he at length resolved to visit the grave, and weep over the memory of his beloved, till despair, or the more friendly laws which he had offended, should terminate his wretched days. In this way, and this way only, could he now flatter himself with rejoining her, whom alone he had loved on earth her who had sacrificed all her noblest prospects for the sake of calling him her own.

Thus resolved, he only awaited the sailing of the Venetian galleys for the west, in which unknown to his kind relation, he had engaged his passage and weighing anchor, after a short voyage to Naples, he fearlessly, or rather with the hope of death advanced into the Tuscan territories, and in the disguise of a pilgrim soon entered Sienna. Here, without acquainting any of his friends with his arrival, he sought at a seasonable hour the spot where rested as he believed, the remains of her he loved and there weeping long and bitterly over her tomb, willingly would he have laid himself by her side, to have slumbered with her in death to whom in life, though his own, he was forbidden thus near to lie. This feeling being ever present to him he resolved at last to indulge it. Concealing himself one evening in the church, where he had deposited implements for his purpose, he issued forth at night to open for himself a way into the vault. As he was on the point of entering, the watchman in his morning rounds hearing some disturbance, approached the spot, and perceiving him thus employed, gave the alarm,

which soon brought numbers of the priests, as well as laymen, half undressed, together. Opening the gates, they discovered the wretched husband within the vault, nor was it long before he was recognized for Mariotto Magnanelli. Being secured, reports of his arrival quickly spread abroad, which, reaching the senate, the public magistrate was immediately directed to take measures that the laws, applying to the culprit, should be put into force. He was accordingly conducted as a prisoner before the Podestà, and the torture being directed to be applied to enforce a true confession, the unfortunate youth gave an exact account of his unhappy adventures, which although they awakened, especially among the women, universal compassion and regret for his unequalled fidelity and attachment, many offering themselves to suffer in his place, were nevertheless not permitted to interfere with the course of justice. He was accordingly sentenced to death, and notwithstanding the intercession of his friends and relatives, was shortly after conducted to execution.

In the meanwhile his unhappy bride, undergoing extreme toil and sufferings, at length succeeded in reaching Alexandria, and immediately went to the house of her dear husband's uncle; and having revealed to him her sad story, was received with the utmost tenderness and compassion. But what was the anguish of her feelings, when instead of embracing the beloved object for whose sake she had supported herself through such trying scenes, she learned that, receiving false accounts of her death, her husband had secretly left the place, and nothing had since been heard of him. She had borne toil and anguish, but every other grief had been light to this, this last of ills, which she could never have foreseen, and the shock of which it must be left to the feeling mind to imagine, since to express it is impossible.

Restored once more to herself, she received the kindness lavished upon her with showers of tears, and consented, thus weeping abundantly, to be accompanied back by the good merchant, without loss of time, to Sienna; clinging to one desperate hope of being reunited to her lover, either living or in the grave. Resuming, then, once more the pilgrim's cowl and staff, this widowed and devoted bride again committed herself with the merchant to the dangerous seas; and now, alas! favouring breezes bore her onwards towards the Tuscan shores. They landed at Piombino, and thence hastened to a

villa belonging to Ser Niccolo, the merchant, not far from Sienna. The first answer they received to their hasty inquiries was, that Mariotto had suffered the sentence of the law only three days before their arrival. However much they had feared still they were far from being prepared to meet, such a confirmation of the calamity, and they were both too greatly afflicted any longer to console each other. The deep and incessant sobs of the unhappy lady would have melted the sternest heart, but at length it became necessary to resolve upon some step, and after affording her every consolation in his power, the kind hearted merchant, with the advice of his friends, and the consent of the unhappy widow, removed her into a neighbouring monastery, where all the tenderness and attentions which her birth and station required were richly supplied. But never did she again look up amidst her sorrow there she continued to weep over her loss, and the misfortunes she had endured, and receiving the consolation and caresses of the abbess who had been informed of her sad story, in silent grief she daily faded away, and often calling piteously upon her dear husband's name, she not long afterwards expired.

## PORTANTINO'S PORK

SABADINO DEGLI ARIENTI

LISTEN, O bright and beautiful ladies, and you, most noble count, and gentlemen all, to the following story, which I trust cannot fail to amuse you!

Not very long ago there were four noble, though somewhat humorous students, residing at our university of Sienna, whose names were Messer Antonio da Clerico, a canonist; Messer Giovanni da Santo Geminiano, a young jurist; Maestro Antonio di Paulo di Val d'Arno d'Arezzo; and Maestro Michele di Cosimo Aretino delli Conti di Palazzolo, who, when young, was surnamed Bacica, now a distinguished civilian in the University of Bologna, full of years and virtue, beloved by the whole people for his kind and charitable actions. But waiving these last considerations, I proceed to inform you, that while remaining in the house of the Master of the Academy of Arts, the youthful pupils became acquainted with a certain disciple of Galen, who though a mere quack, imagined he was possessed of more learning than Avicenna himself. His name was Niccolo da Massa, to which had been added that of *Portantino*, from the peculiarity of his ambling gait; and as his residence lay opposite to that of the governor, his singularities attracted the particular attention of the pupils.

Now it happened that in the month of February, during the salting season, the doctor had purchased a fine pig, which he subsequently had killed, and hung up, as is usual, previous to the operation of salting, for four or five days in his kitchen. The merry scholars, aware of this stage of the proceedings, set their heads to contrive how they might feast at the doctor's charge. It so fell out, that a fellow-student named Messer Pietro di Leri Martini, had lately left the academy, and afterwards died of a fever; and on this fact they resolved to ground the success of their exploit. Introducing themselves secretly into the doctor's premises, and watching their opportunity, they laid hands upon the pork, a fact which struck the doctor

with equal horror and surprise when he beheld his kitchen the next morning emptied of its treasure. After indulging in a variety of imprecations and suspicions his doubts at last fell upon his young neighbours the scholars who had indeed already acquired some little reputation for similar exploits. Believing that he had now discovered the authors of the diabolical theft he waited on Messer Amadio da Città di Castello the presiding magistrate in Senna who having heard his evidence dispatched three several messengers commanding an immediate restoration of the pork to the right owner unless the young gentlemen wished to be proceeded against criminally. The answer which the magistrate received was that the scholars were greatly surprised at such a message and were sorry that they had not so fine a pig in their possession happening to know nothing about it. But being still persecuted with the complaints of the doctor the magistrate resolved to investigate the affair thoroughly sending a warrant to search the scholars chambers and to bring them all before him should the pork be discovered in their possession. Expecting such a visit the students were not a little puzzled how to proceed when Messer Antonio da Clerico who by his singular ingenuity and facetiousness had always shown himself equal to every emergency encouraged the flagging spirits of his companions saying Fear not my brave boys fear not the Podestà and his myrmidons we will be a match for them yet. We will extract a little amusement out of them too if you mind what I say. Let us get up a sick couch in the chamber opposite the entrance hall and fill it with all kinds of the most sickly preparations that can disgust the human nose. And when the officers come you must all stand at the entrance buried in profound grief and when they ask you what is the matter shake your heads and point to the inner chamber saying Poor fellow he is dying of the plague. Now this sick gentleman shall be no other than the pig and trust me whoever ventures within sight of him shall wish himself away again as speedily as possible. For you know the whole city is disturbed about the death of our fellow student who died only the other day of the plague. His companions immediately set up a loud laugh in token of their approbation crying Come let us go to work then we cannot be hanged for it after all. Then preparing a table spread with cushions they laid the pig upon it at full length with a nightcap over his head and stuck out his forefeet with white sleeves so as to resemble the arms of a

human being; while his hind ones were decorated with a pair of slippers. Soon after completing their arrangements, appeared the officers of the police, who on requiring entrance, were readily admitted by the scholars, some of whom, on advancing farther, they found overwhelmed with sorrow, wringing their hands, and crying out most piteously: "Oh, my dear, dear brother"; at which the officers, apprehending some fatal accident, inquired into the cause of their complaint. The shrewd Maestro Michele on this stepped forward: "It is my brother, my poor brother, who is here dying, we are afraid." "Dying! What is the matter with him?" "They say it is the plague; but I will never desert him!" On this one of the officers opened the chamber door with some caution, and stumbling on the shocking object which presented itself, drew back in great alarm; for on the left hand was seen Messer Antonio, as the priest, administering spiritual consolation, with book and crucifix in hand, and wax lights burning, to the poor scholar, falling apparently a victim to the plague. At this overpowering sight, without saying a word, he ran out of the house, followed by his companions. Returning to the magistrate, he with difficulty made himself understood; expressing the utmost horror of the business on which he had been sent. "How," cried the magistrate, "can it be true?" "True?" returned the officer; "I saw the poor wretch stretched out, dying of the plague, and his brother and all his companions buried in the deepest grief." "And did you go into the room? did you touch the body?" inquired the magistrate. "To be sure I did." "Then why do you come here? Away with you, you wretches; we shall have the whole city infected": and the magistrate drove them away, forbidding them, as they valued their lives, again to enter into his presence.

The wily Messer Antonio, called the priest, in the meanwhile, observing the rout of these myrmidons of the law, hastily dressed himself amidst the triumph and applauses of his companions, and set out for the house of the Podestà, in order to obviate any disagreeable consequences that might attend the tidings which had just gone forth. He arrived just in time to catch the magistrate as he was proceeding to the grand council, to acquaint the members with the fact which had just transpired, and propose means for the safety of the city. To him, then, Messer Antonio related the whole of the affair, on the part of the scholars, as it had occurred from the beginning. It was a great relief to the magistrate to hear that there was really no

pestilential disorder abroad, and he laughed outright at the humorous way in which Messer Antonio related to him the incidents of the story. Oh, you collegians ' he cried, you are true children of perdition. There is nothing of which you are not capable, and woe to the unfortunate wretch that falls into your hands. As they were now approaching the Palazzo delli Signori, the Podestà resolved, instead of alarming them with tidings of the plague, to amuse them with one of the best stories which he had for some time heard. Such was the pleasure which it afforded that they obliged its ingenious author to repeat the whole to them again, mingling their mirth with a little seasonable advice and commanding him to make immediate restitution of the doctor's pig. But to this with one voice the scholars all demurred, beseeching their lordships that they would not please to insist on such hard conditions, inasmuch as it would be throwing a sort of discredit on real learning were they to refuse to permit the scholars to punish so much absurd quackery and ignorance, as were manifested by this disciple of Galen and they trusted that their lordships would not interfere to interrupt the joke in the happiest stage but would permit them to eat the pig since they had caught it. Grateful for the entertainment afforded them the council could scarcely prevail upon themselves to treat the ingenious author of the plot with the rigour of the law although they strongly advised restitution of the pig. But the humorous Antonio conducted his defence in so happy and eloquent a manner, that the pork was allowed to remain in the hands of the scholars and the court adjourned. They immediately proceeded to regale themselves with the spoils they had won. Frequently that night did they drink to the health of Doctor Portantino, who had presented them with a portion of the feast nor were the wines less relished after they had partaken of roasted pig.

# THE STORY OF JULIET

LUIGI DA PORTO

At the period when Bartolommeo della Scala, a gentle and accomplished prince, presided over the destinies of our native place, a fine and beautiful tract of country, I frequently remember hearing my father say, that there flourished two noble, but rival families, whose exasperation against each other was carried to the utmost extreme. The name of one of these was the Cappelletti, that of the other the Montecchi; and it is believed that the descendants of the latter faction are now residing in Udino, in the persons of Messer Niccolo and Messer Giovanni, who settled there by some strange chance, under the title of Monticoli of Verona. They would appear, however, to have retained little of their ancient splendour and reputation, beyond their courteous manners and demeanour. And although, on perusing several ancient chronicles, I have met with the names of the families, who are mentioned as united in the same cause, I shall merely touch upon their history, as it was told me in the following words, without deviating from the original authority.

Both families, we are told, were equally powerful and wealthy, abounding in friends and relatives, and highly favoured in Verona, under the above-mentioned prince. Whether of a private or a public nature, the feud which arose between them was of a very ferocious and fatal character, various partisans on both sides falling victims to its rage. Nor was it until weary of mutual wrongs, and awed by the repeated commands and entreaties of their prince, that they were induced to enter into such terms as to meet or to address each other peaceably without apprehension of further violence and bloodshed. But daily becoming more reconciled, it happened that a festival was to be given by Messer Antonio, the head of the house of the Cappelletti, a man of gay and joyous character, who made the most magnificent preparations to receive all the chief families in the city. At one of these assemblies there one evening appeared a youth of the Montecchi family, who followed thither

some lady whom he was desirous, as lovers often are, of accompanying in person (no less than in mind) upon such occasions of general festivity. He had a noble and commanding person, with elegant and accomplished manners, and he had no sooner withdrawn his mask, screening himself in the character of a wood-nymph, than every eye was turned with admiration on his beauty, which appeared to surpass even that of the most beautiful ladies present. But he more especially attracted the attention of an only daughter of Messer Antonio, whose charms both of mind and person were unrivalled throughout the whole city. Such was the impression she received at his appearance, that from the moment their eyes first met, she found that she was no longer mistress of her own feelings. She saw him retire into a distant part of the assembly, seldom coming forward either in the dance, or in converse with others, bearing himself like one who kept a jealous watch over some beloved object, whom he would fain have held aloof from the joyous scene. Such a thought struck a chill to her heart, as she had heard he was a youth of warm and animated manners. About the approach of midnight, towards the conclusion of the ball, was struck up the dance of the torch, or of the hat, whichever we choose to call it, usually proposed with us before the breaking-up of the feast. While the company stand round in a circle, each dancer takes his lady, and the lady him, changing partners as they please. As it went round, the noble youth was led out by a lady, who chanced to place him near the enamoured daughter of Cappelletti. On the other side of her stood a youth named Marcuccio Guercio, whose hand, ever cold to the touch, happened to come in contact with the fair lady's palm; and soon after Romeo Montecchi, being on her left hand, took it in his, as was customary. On which the lady, anxious to hear his voice, said "Welcome to my side, Messer Romeo"; and he observing her eyes were fixed upon his, awaiting his reply, and delighted at the tone of her voice, returned "How! am I indeed then welcome?" "Yes and I ought to thank you," she returned, smiling, "since my left hand is warmed by your touch, whilst that of Marcuccio freezes my right." Assuming a little more confidence, Romeo again replied "If your hand, lady, feels the warmth of mine, my heart no less has kindled warm at your eyes." A short, bright smile was the only answer to this, except that in a lower tone, as fearful of being seen or heard, she half whispered back "I vow, O Romeo, there is no lady

here, whom I think nearly so handsome as you seem to me." Fascinated by her sweet address, Romeo, with still greater warmth, replied: "Whatever I may be, I only wish you, sweet lady, to hold me ever at your service." When the festival broke up, and Romeo had retired to his chamber, dwelling on the harsh usage of his former love, from whose eyes he had drunk softness mixed with too much scorn, he resolved to give his soul wholly, even to the fair foe of his father's house. She, on the other hand, had thought of little else since she left him, than of the supreme felicity she should enjoy in obtaining so noble a youth for her lord. Yet when she reverted to the deadly enmity which had so long reigned between the two houses, her fears overpowered the gentler feelings of her soul; and unable wholly to subdue them, she inveighed against her own folly in the following words: "Wretch that I am! what enchantment thus drags me to my ruin? Without hope or guide, oh, how shall I escape? for Romeo loves me not. Alas! he perhaps feels nothing but hatred against our house, and would perhaps only seek my shame. And were it possible he should think of taking me for his wedded wife, my father would never consent to bestow my hand." Then revolving other feelings in her mind, she flattered herself that their attachment might become the means of further reconciliation between the houses, even now wearied with their mutual feuds; and, "Oh!" she exclaimed, "what a blissful means of changing foes into relatives!" Fixed in this resolve, she again met Romeo with eyes of softness and regard. Mutually animated with equal ardour and admiration, the loved image was fixed so deeply in their imagination, that they could no longer refrain from seeing each other; and sometimes at the windows and sometimes in the church, they sought with avidity every occasion to express their mutual passion through their eyes, and neither of them seemed to enjoy rest out of the presence of the beloved object. But chiefly, Romeo, fired at the sight of her exquisite charms and manners, braved all risks for the pleasure of having her near him; and he would frequently pass the greatest part of the night around her house, beneath her windows, or, scaling the walls, force his way to the balcony that commanded a view of her chamber, without the knowledge either of herself or others; and there he would sit for hours, gazing and listening his soul away, enamoured of her looks and voice. He would afterwards throw himself listlessly to sleep, careless of returning home, in

the woods or in the roads But one evening, as love would have it, the moon shining out more brightly than usual, the adventurous Romeo was discovered by his lady, as she opened the casement, on the balcony Imagining that it might be someone else, he retreated, when catching a glimpse of his figure, she gently called to him "Wherefore, O Romeo, come you hither?"

It is the will of love therefore do I come," he replied "And if you should be found here, Romeo, know you it will be sudden death?" "Too well I do, dear lady, and I doubt not it will happen so some night, if you refuse me your aid But as I must at some time die, wherever I may be, I would rather yield my breath here as near you as I dare, with whom I would ever choose to live, did Heaven and you consent" To which words the lady replied "Believe me, Romeo, it is not I who would forbid thee to remain honourably at my side, it is thou, and the enmity thou and thine bear us, that stand between us twain" "Yet can I truly aver," replied the youth, "that the dearest hope I have long indulged, has been to make you mine, and if you had equal wishes, on you alone it would rest to make me for ever yours no hand of man, believe me, love, should sunder us again" On saying this, they agreed on further means to meet again, and converse much longer some future evening, and they retired, full of each other, to rest

The noble youth having frequently in this way held appointments with her, one winter's evening, while the snow fell thick and fast about him, he called to her from the usual spot "Ah, Juliet, Juliet! how long will you see me thus languishing in vain? Do you feel nothing for me, who through these cold nights, exposed to the stormy weather, wait on the cold ground to behold you?" "Alas, alas! I do indeed pity you," returned a sweet voice, 'but what would you that I should do? often have I besought you to go away'" "No, no," returned Romeo, 'not away, and therefore, gentle lady, deign to give me refuge in your chamber, from these bitter winds'" Turning towards him with a somewhat scornful voice, the lady reproached him "Romeo, I love you as much as it is possible for woman to love, therefore it is that you ask me this, your worth has led me farther than I ought to go But cruel as you are, if you dream that you can enjoy my love by long prevailing suit, in the manner you imagine, lay such thoughts aside, for you deceive yourself, Montecchi And as I will no longer see you nightly perilling your life for me, I frankly tell you, Romeo, that if you

please to take me as I am, I will joyfully become your wife, giving myself up wholly to your will, ready to follow you over the world wherever you may think best." "And this," replied the gentle youth, "is all I have so long wished; now then let it be done!" "So let it be, even as you will," cried Juliet; "only permit the Friar Lorenzo da San Francesco, my confessor, first to knit our hands, if you wish me wholly and happily to become yours." "Am I to suppose, then, that Friar Lorenzo, my love, is acquainted with the secret of your breast?" "Yes, Romeo," returned Juliet, "and he will be ready to grant us what we request of him": and here, having fixed upon the proper measures, they again took leave of each other.

The friar, who belonged to the minor Order of Osservanza, was a very learned man, well skilled no less in natural than in magical arts, and was extremely intimate with Romeo, in whom he had found it necessary to confide, on an occasion in which he might otherwise have forfeited his reputation, which he was very desirous of maintaining with the vulgar. He had fixed upon Romeo in his emergency, as the most brave and prudent gentleman he knew, to trust with the affair he had in hand. To him only he unbosomed his whole soul: and Romeo, having now recourse to him in his turn, acquainted him with his resolution of making the lovely daughter of Messer Antonio, as quickly as possible, his wedded wife, and that they had together fixed upon him as the secret instrument and witness of their nuptials, and afterwards as the medium of their reconciliation with her father.

The friar immediately signified his consent, no less because he ventured not to oppose or disoblige the lover, than because he believed it might be attended with happy results; in which case he would be likely to derive great honour from the heads of both houses, as the means of their reconciliation. In the meanwhile, it being the season of Lent, the fair Juliet, under semblance of going to confession, sought the residence of Friar Francesco, and having entered into one of the confessionals made use of by the monks, she inquired for Lorenzo, who hearing her voice, led her along after Romeo into the convent. Then closing the doors of the confessional, he removed an iron grate which had hitherto separated her from her lover, saying: "I have been always glad to see you, my daughter; but you will now be far dearer to me than ever, if you wish to receive Messer Romeo, here, as your husband." To which Juliet

answered, that there was nothing she so much wished, as that she might lawfully become his wife, and that she had therefore hastened thither, in order that before Heaven and him, she might take those vows which love and honour required, and which the friar must witness, as her trust in him was great.

Then in the presence of the priest, who performed the ceremony under the seal of confession, Romeo espoused the fair young Juliet and having concluded how they were to meet each other again at night, exchanging a single kiss, they took leave of the friar, who remained in the confessional, awaiting the arrival of penitents. Having thus secretly obtained the object of their wishes, the youthful Romeo and his bride for many days enjoyed the most unalloyed felicity, hoping at the same time for a favourable occasion to become reconciled to her father, in acquainting him with their marriage. But fortune, as if envious of their supreme happiness, just at this time revived the old deadly feud between the houses in such a way, that in a few days, neither of them wishing to yield to the other the Montecchi and the Cappelletti meeting together, from words proceeded to blows. Desirous to avoid giving any mortal hurts to his sweet wife's relatives, Romeo had the sorrow of beholding his own party either wounded or driven from the streets, and incensed with passion against Tebaldo Cappelletti the most formidable of his adversaries, he struck him dead at his feet with a single blow, and put his companions to flight, terrified at the loss of their chief. The homicide had been witnessed by too many to remain long a secret, and the complaint being brought before the prince, the Cappelletti threw the blame exclusively on Romeo, who was sentenced by the council to perpetual banishment from Verona. It is easier for those who truly love, to imagine, than it is here to describe, the sensations of the young bride on receiving these tidings. She wept long and bitterly, refusing to hear any consolation, and her grief was deepened by the reflection that she could share it with no one. Romeo, on the other hand, regretted leaving his country on her account alone and, resolving to take a sorrowful farewell of the object of all his soul's wishes he had again recourse to the assistance of the friar, who dispatched a faithful follower of Romeo's father to apprise his wife of the time and place of meeting and thither she eagerly repaired. Retiring together into the confessional, they there wept bitterly over their misfortune. The young bride at length checking her

tears, exclaimed in an accent of despair: "I cannot bear to live! What will my life be without you? Oh, let me fly with you; wherever you go I will follow, a faithful and loving servant. I will cast these long tresses away, and by none shall you be served so well, so truly, as by me." "No, never let it be said," replied Romeo, "that you accompanied me in other guise than in that of a cherished and honoured bride. Yet were it not that I feel assured that our affairs will soon improve, and that the strife between our two families will very shortly cease, indeed I could not bear, my love, to leave you. We shall not long be divided, and my thoughts, sweet Juliet, will be ever with you. And should we not be quickly restored to each other, it will then be time to fix how we are to meet again." So, after having wept and embraced each other again and again, they tore themselves asunder, his wife entreating that he would remain as near her as possible, and by no means go so far as Rome or Florence.

After concealing himself for some time in the monastery of Friar Lorenzo, Romeo set out more dead than alive for Mantua, but not before he had agreed with the servant of the lady, that he was to be informed, through the friar, of every particular that might occur during his absence; and he further instructed the servant, as he valued his protection and rewards, to obey his wife in the minutest things which she might require of him. After her husband had departed, she gave herself up a prey to the deepest grief; a grief so incessant as to leave its traces on her beauty, and attract the attention of her mother. She tenderly loved her daughter, and affectionately inquiring into the cause of her affliction, she merely received vague excuses in reply. "But you are always in tears, my daughter," she continued, "what is it that can affect you thus? tell me, for you are dear to me as my own life, and if it depend upon me, you shall no longer weep." Then imagining that her daughter might probably wish to bestow her hand in marriage, yet be afraid of avowing her wishes, she determined to speak to her husband on the subject; and thus, in the hope of promoting her health and happiness, she pursued the very means that led to her destruction.

She informed Messer Antonio that she had observed, for many days past, that something was preying on their daughter's mind, that she was no longer like the same creature, and that although she had used every means to obtain her confidence as to the

source of her affliction, it had been all in vain. She then urged her suspicions that Juliet perhaps wished to marry, but that like a discreet girl, as she certainly was, she was averse to declare her feelings. So I think, Messer Antonio, we had better, without more delay, make choice for our daughter of a noble husband. Juliet has already completed her eighteenth year on Saint Euphemia's day, and when they have advanced much beyond this period the beauty of women, so far from improving is rather on the wane. Besides," continued her mother, "it is not well to keep girls too long at home, though our Juliet has always been an excellent child. I am aware you have already fixed upon her dower, and we have nothing to do but to select a proper object for her love." Messer Antonio agreed with his lady, and highly commended the virtues and the prudence of his daughter. Not many days afterwards, they proposed and entered into a treaty of marriage between the Count of Lodrone and their daughter. When it was on the point of being concluded the lady, hoping to surprise her daughter with the agreeable tidings, bade her now rejoice, for that in a very few days she would be happily settled in marriage with a noble youth, and that she must no longer grieve, for it would take place with her father's consent, and that of all her friends.

On hearing these words, Juliet burst into a flood of tears while her mother endeavoured to console her with the hope of being happily settled in life, within the course of eight days.

You will then become the wife of Count Lodrone, nay, do not weep for it is really true will you not be happy, Juliet, then?" "No no my dear mother, I shall never be happy." "Then what can be the matter with you? what do you want? Only tell me I will do anything you wish." "Then I would wish to die, mother, nothing else is left me now." Her mother then first became aware that she was the victim of some deep-seated passion, and saying little more, she left her. In the evening she related to her husband what had passed, at which he testified great displeasure, saying that it would be necessary to have the affair examined into, before venturing to proceed further with the count. And fearful lest any blame might attach to his family, he soon after sent for Juliet, with the intention of consulting her on the proposed marriage. "It is my wish, my dear Juliet, to form an honourable connection for you in marriage. Will you be satisfied with it?" After remaining silent for some moments, his daughter replied "No,

dear father, I cannot be satisfied." "Am I to suppose, then, that you wish to take the veil, daughter?" "Indeed I know not what——" and with these words out gushed a flood of bitter tears. "But this I know," returned her father, "you shall give your hand to Count Lodrone; and therefore trouble yourself no further." "Never, never," cried Juliet, still weeping bitterly. On this Messer Antonio threatened her with his heaviest displeasure, did she again venture to dispute his will, commanding her immediately to reveal the cause of her unhappiness. And when he could obtain no other reply than sobs and tears, he quitted the apartment in a violent passion, unable to penetrate into her motives, leaving her with her mother alone. The wretched bride had already acquainted the servant, entrusted with their secret, whose name was Pietro, with everything which had passed between herself and her parents, taking him to witness that she would sooner die than become the wife of any lord but Romeo. And this the good Pietro had carefully conveyed through the friar to the ears of the banished man, who had written to her, encouraging her to persevere, and by no means to betray the secret of their love; as he was then taking measures, within less than ten days, to bear her from her father's house. Messer Antonio, and his Lady Giovanna, being unable in the meanwhile, either by threats or kindness, to discover their daughter's objections to the marriage, or whether she was attached to another, determined to prosecute their design. "Weep no more, girl," cried her mother, "for married you shall be, though you were to take one of the Montecchi by the hand, which I am sure you will never be compelled to do." Fresh sobs and tears at these words burst from the poor girl, which only served to hasten the preparations for their daughter's nuptials. Her despair was terrible when she heard the day named, and calling upon death to save her, she rushed out of her chamber, and repairing as fast as possible to the convent of the friar, in whom, next to Romeo, she trusted, and from whom she had received tidings of her husband, she revealed to him the cause of her anguish, often interrupted by her tears. She then conjured him, by the friendship and obligations which he owed to Romeo, to assist her in this her utter need. "Alas! of what use can I be," replied the friar, "when your two houses are even now so violently opposed to each other?" "But I know, Father, that you are a learned and experienced man, and you can assist me in many ways if you please. If you should

refuse me everything else, at least, however, grant me this. My nuptials are even now preparing in my father's palace, he is now gone out of the city to give orders at the villa on the Mantuan road whither they are about to carry me, that I may there be compelled to receive the count, without a chance of opposition as he is to meet me on my arrival at the place. Give me therefore poison to free me at once, from the grief and shame of exposing the wife of Romeo to such a scene. Give me poison or I will myself plunge a dagger into my bosom.

The friar on hearing these desperate intentions and aware how deeply he was implicated with Romeo who might become his worst enemy were he not in some way to obviate the danger turning to Juliet said You know my daughter, that I confess a great portion of the people here and am respected by all no testament no reconciliation taking place without my mediation I am therefore careful of giving rise to any suspicions which might affect me, and should especially wish to conceal my interference in an affair like the present I would not incur such a scandal for all the treasure in the world But as I am attached both to yourself and Romeo, I will exert myself in your favour in such a way as I believe no one ever before did You must first however take a vow that you will never betray to others the secret I now entrust you with' Speak speak boldly Father cried Juliet, and give me the poison for I will inform nobody I will give you no poison returned the friar young and beautiful as you are it would be too deep a sin But if you possess courage to execute what I shall propose I trust I may be able to deliver you safely into the hands of Romeo You are aware that the family vault of the Cappelletti lies beyond this church in the cemetery of our convent Now I will give you a certain powder, which when you have taken it will throw you into a deep slumber of eight and forty hours and during that time you will be to all appearance dead not even the most skilful physician being able to detect a spark of life remaining In this state you will be interred in the vault of the Cappelletti and at a fitting season I will be in readiness to take you away, and bring you to my own cell where you can stay until I go which will not be long to the chapter after which disguised in a monk's dress I will bear you myself to your husband But tell me are you not afraid of being near the corpse of Tebaldo, your cousin so recently interred in the same place? With serene and joyful

looks the young bride returned: "No, Father; for if by such means I can ever reach my Romeo, I would face not this alone, but the terrors of hell itself." "This is well; let it be done," cried the friar; "but first write with your own hand an exact account of the whole affair to Romeo, lest by any mischance, supposing you dead, he may be impelled by his despair to do some desperate deed; for I am sure he is passionately attached to you. There are always some of my brethren who have occasion to go to Mantua, where your husband resides: let me have your letter to him, and I will send it by a faithful messenger."

Having said this, the good monk, without the interference of whose holy Order we find no matters of importance transacted, leaving the lady in the confessional, returned to his cell; but soon came back, bringing a small vase, with the powder in it, saying: "Drink this, mixed with simple water, about midnight, and fear not. In two hours after, it will begin to take effect, and I doubt not but our design will be crowned with success. But haste, and forget not to write the letter as I have directed you, to Romeo, for it is of great importance." Securing the powder, the fair bride hastened joyfully home to her mother, saying: "Truly, dear mother, Friar Lorenzo is one of the best confessors in the world. He has so kindly advised me that I am quite recovered from my late unhappiness." Overjoyed on perceiving her daughter's cheerfulness, the Lady Giovanna replied: "And you shall return his kindness, my dear girl, with interest; his poor brethren shall never be in want of alms." Juliet's recovered spirits now banished every suspicion from the mind of her parents, of her previous attachment to another; and they believed that some unhappy incident had given rise to the strange and melancholy disposition they had observed. They would now have been glad to withdraw their promise of bestowing her hand upon the count, but they had already proceeded so far that they could not, without much difficulty, retreat. Her lover was desirous that some one of his friends should see her; and her mother, Lady Giovanna, being somewhat delicate in her health, it was resolved that her daughter, accompanied by two of her aunts, should be carried to the villa, at a short distance from the city, a step to which she made no opposition. She accordingly went; and imagining that her father would, immediately on her arrival, insist upon the marriage, she took care to secure the powder given to her

by the friar At the approach of midnight, calling one of her favourite maids, brought up with her from her childhood, she requested her to bring her a glass of water, observing that she felt very thirsty, and as she drank it in the presence of the maid, and one of her aunts, she exclaimed that her father should never bestow her hand upon the count against her own consent These simple women, though they had observed her throw the powder into the water, which she said was to refresh her, suspected nothing further, and went to rest When the servant had retired with the light, her young mistress rose from her bed, dressed herself, and again lay down, composing her decent limbs as if she were never more to rise, with her hands crossed upon her breast, awaiting the dreaded result In little more than two hours she lay to all appearance dead, and in this state she was discovered the next morning The maid and her aunt, unable to awake her feeling that she was already quite cold, and recollecting the powder, the strange expressions she had used, and, above all, seeing her dressed, began to scream aloud, supposing her to have poisoned herself On this, the cries of her own maid who loved her, were terrible "True, too true, dear lady, you said that your father should never marry you against your will Alas! you asked me for the very water which was to occasion your death Wretch that I am! And have you indeed left me, and left me thus? With my own hands I gave you the fatal cup, which with yours, will have caused the death of your father, your mother, and us all Ah, why did you not take me with you, who have always so dearly loved you in life!" And saying this she threw herself by the side of her young mistress, embracing her cold form Messer Antonio, hearing a violent uproar, hastened, trembling, to ascertain the cause, and the first object he beheld was his daughter stretched out in her chamber a corpse Although he believed her gone beyond recovery, when he heard what she had drunk, he immediately sent to Verona for a very experienced physician, who having carefully observed and examined his daughter, declared that she had died of the effects of the poison six hours before

The wretched father, on hearing his worst fears confirmed, was overwhelmed with grief, and the same tidings reaching the distracted mother, suddenly deprived her of all consciousness When she was at length restored, she tore her hair, and calling upon her daughter's name, filled the air with her shrieks "She

is gone! the only sweet solace of my aged days. Cruel, cruel, thou hast left me without even giving thy poor mother a last farewell! At least I might have drunk thy last words and sighs, and closed thine eyes in peace. Let my women come about me, let them assist me, that I may die! if they have any pity left, they will kill me; far better so to die than of a lingering death of grief. O God, in thy infinite mercy take me away, for my life will be a burden to me now!" Her women then came round her, and bore her to the couch, still weeping, and refusing all the consolation they could offer to her. The body of Juliet was, in the meantime, carried to Verona, and consigned with extraordinary ceremonies, amidst the lamentations of a numerous train of friends and relatives, to the vault, in the cemetery of San Francesco, where the last rites to the dead were discharged.

The friar having occasion to be absent from the city, had, according to his promise, confided Juliet's letter to Romeo to the hands of one of his brethren going to Mantua. On arriving he called several times at the house, without having the good fortune to meet with Romeo, and unwilling to trust such a letter to others, he retained it in his own hands, until Pietro, hearing of the death of Juliet, and not finding the friar in the city, resolved to bear the unhappy tidings to his master. He arrived in Mantua the following night, and meeting with Romeo, who had not yet received the letter from the priest, he related to him, with tears in his eyes, the death of his young bride, whose burial he had himself witnessed. The hue of death stole over the features of Romeo as he proceeded with the sad story; and drawing his sword, he was about to stab himself on the spot, had he not been prevented by force. "It is well," he cried, "but I shall not long survive the lady of my soul, whom I valued more than life. O Juliet, Juliet, it is thy husband who doomed thee to death! I came not, as I promised, to bear thee from thy cruel father, whilst thou, to preserve thy sweet faith unbroken, hast died for me; and shall I, through fear of death, survive alone? No, this shall never be." Then throwing a dark cloak which he wore, over Pietro's shoulders, he cried: "Away, away, leave me!" Romeo closed the doors after him, and preferring every other evil to that of life, only considered the best manner of getting rid of it. At last he assumed the dress of a peasant, and taking out a species of poison, which he had always carried with him, to use in case of emergency, he

placed it under the sleeve of his coat, and immediately set out on his return to Verona. Journeying on with wild and melancholy thoughts, he now defied his fate, hoping to fall by the hands of justice, or to lay himself down in the vault by the side of her he loved, and die.

In this resolution, on the evening of the following day after her interment, he arrived at Verona, without being discovered by any one. The same night as soon as the city became hushed, he resorted to the convent of the Frati Minori, where the tombs of the Cappelletti lay. The church was situated in the Cittadella, where the monks at that time resided, although, for some reason they have since left it for the suburb of San Zeno, now called Santo Bernardino, and the Cittadella was formerly indeed inhabited by San Francesco himself. Near the outer walls of this place, there were then placed a number of large monuments such as we see round many churches, and beneath one of these was the ancient sepulchre of all the Cappelletti, in which the beautiful bride then lay. Romeo approaching near not long after midnight and possessing great strength, removed the heavy covering by force and with some wooden stakes which he had brought with him, he propped it up to prevent it from closing again, until he wished it, and he then entered the tomb and replaced the covering. The lamp he carried cast a lurid light around while his eyes wandered in search of the loved object, which, bursting open the living tomb he quickly found. He beheld the features of the beautiful Juliet now mingled with a heap of lifeless dust and bones, on which a sudden tide of sorrow sprung into his eyes, and amidst bitter sobs he thus spoke: 'O eyes, which while our loves to Heaven were dear shone sweetly upon mine! O sweeter mouth a thousand and a thousand times so fondly kissed by me alone, and rich in honied words! O bosom, in which my whole heart lay treasured up, alas, all closed and mute and cold I find ye now! My hapless wife, what hath love done for thee, but led thee hither? And why so soon two wretched lovers perish? I had not looked for this, when hope and passion first whispered of other things. But I have lived to witness even this and he pressed his lips to her mouth and bosom mingling his kisses with his tears. Walls of the dead,' he cried, 'why fall ye not around me, and crush me into dust? Yet as death is in the power of all, it is a despicable thing to wish yet fear it too. Then taking out the poison from under his vest, he

thus continued: "By what strange fatality am I brought to die in the sepulchre of my enemies, some of whom this hand hath slain! But as it is pleasant to die near those we love, now, my beloved, let me die!" Then seizing the fatal vial, he poured its whole contents into his frame; and catching the fair body of Juliet in his arms in a wild embrace, "Still so sweet," he cried, "dear limbs, mine, only mine! And if yet thy pure spirit live, my Juliet, let it look from its seat of bliss to witness and forgive my cruel death; as I could not delighted live with thee, it is not forbidden me with thee to die": and winding his arms about her, he awaited his final doom. The hour was now arrived when, the vital powers of the slumbering lady reviving, and subduing the icy coldness of the poison, she would awake. Thus straitly folded in the last embraces of Romeo, she suddenly recovered her senses, and uttering a deep sigh, she cried: "Alas! where am I? in whose arms, whose kisses? Oh, unbind me, wretch that I am! Base friar, is it thus you keep your word to Romeo, thus lead me to his arms?" Great was her husband's surprise to feel Juliet alive in his embrace. Recalling the idea of Pygmalion, "Do you know me, sweet wife?" he cried. "It is your love, your Romeo; hither come to die with you. I came alone and secretly from Mantua, to find your place of rest." Finding herself within the sepulchre, and in the arms of Romeo, Juliet would not at first give credit to her senses; but springing out of his arms, gazed a moment eagerly on his face, and the next fell on his neck with a torrent of tears and kisses: "Oh, Romeo, Romeo, what madness brings you hither? Were not my letters which I sent you by the friar enough to tell you of my feigned death, and that I should shortly be restored to you?" The wretched youth, aware of the whole calamity, then gave a loose to his despair: "Beyond all other griefs that lovers ever bore, Romeo, thy lot has been! My life, my soul, I never had thy letters!" And he told her the piteous tale, which he had heard from the lips of her servant, and that concluding she was dead, he had hastened to keep her company, and had already drunk the deadly draught. At these last words, his unhappy bride, uttering a wild scream, began to beat her breast and tear her hair, and then, in a state of distraction, she threw herself by the side of Romeo, already lying on the ground, and pouring over him a deluge of tears, imprinted her last kisses on his lips. All pale and trembling, she cried: "O my Romeo! will you die in my sight, and I too the occasion of your death?"

Must I live even a moment after you? Ah, would that I could give my life for yours! Would that I alone might die! In a faint and dying tone her husband replied "If my love and truth were ever dear to you, my Juliet, live, for my sake live, for it is sweet to know that you will then be often thinking of him who now dies for you, with his eyes still fixed on yours" "Die! yes! you die for the death which in me was only feigned! What, therefore, should I do for this your real, cruel death? I only grieve that I have no means of accompanying you, and hate myself that I must linger on earth till I obtain them. But it shall not be long before the wretch who caused your death shall follow you" and uttering these words with pain, she swooned away upon his body. On again reviving, she felt she was catching the last breath which now came thick and fast from the breast of her husband.

Friar Lorenzo, in the meanwhile, aware of the supposed death and of the interment of Juliet, and knowing that the termination of her slumber was near, proceeded with a faithful companion about an hour before sunrise, to the monument. On approaching the place he heard her sobs and cries, and saw the light of a lamp through an aperture in the sepulchre. Surprised at this he imagined that Juliet must have secreted the light in the monument and awaking and finding no one there, had thus begun to weep and bewail herself. But on opening the sepulchre with the help of his companion he beheld the weeping and distracted Juliet holding her dying husband in her arms, on which he immediately said "What! did you think, my daughter, I should leave you here to die? To which she only answered with another burst of sorrow "No! away! I only fear lest I should be made to live. Away, and close our sepulchre over our heads here let me die. Or, in the name of pity, lend me a dagger that I may strike it into my bosom, and escape from my woes. Ah, cruel father! well hast thou fulfilled thy promise, well delivered to Romeo his letters, and wed me, and borne me safely to him! See, he is lying dead in my arms" and she repeated the fatal tale. Thunderstruck at these words, the friar gazed upon the dying Romeo, exclaiming with horror "My friend my Romeo! alas! what chance hath torn thee from us? Thy Juliet calls thee, Romeo, look up and hope. Thou art lying in her beautiful bosom, and wilt not speak." On hearing her loved name he raised his languid eyes, heavy with death, and fixing them on her for a short space, closed them

again. The next moment, turning himself round upon his face, in a last struggle, he expired.

Thus wretchedly fell the noble youth, long lamented over by his fair bride, till on the approach of day, the friar tenderly inquired what she would wish to do? "To be left and to die where I am," was the reply. "Do not, daughter, say this, but come with me; for though I scarcely know in what way to proceed, I can perhaps find means of obtaining a refuge for you in some monastery, where you may address your prayers to heaven for your own and for your husband's sake." "I desire you to do nothing for me," replied Juliet; "except this one thing, which I trust, for the sake of his memory," pointing to the body of Romeo, "you will do. Never breathe a syllable to any one living of our unhappy death, that our bodies may rest here together for ever in peace. And should our sad loves come to light, I pray you will beseech both our parents to permit our remains to continue mingled together in this sepulchre, as in love and in death we were still one." Then turning again towards the body of Romeo, whose head she held sustained upon her lap, and whose eyes she had just closed, bathing his cold features with her tears, she addressed him as if he had been in life: "What shall I now do, my dear lord, since you have deserted me? What can I do but follow you? for nothing else is left me: death itself shall not keep me from you." Having said this, and feeling the full weight of her irreparable loss in the death of her noble husband, resolute to die, she drew in her breath, and retaining it for some time, suddenly uttered a loud shriek, and fell dead by her lover's side. The friar perceiving that she was indeed dead, was seized with such a degree of terror and surprise, that, unable to come to any resolution, he sat down with his companion in the sepulchre, bewailing the destiny of the lovers. At this time some of the officers of the police, being in search of a notorious robber, arrived at the spot; and perceiving a light, and the sound of voices, they straightway ran to the place, and seizing upon the priests, inquired into their business. Friar Lorenzo, recognizing some of these men, was overpowered with shame and fear; but assuming a lofty voice, exclaimed: "Back, sirs, I am not the man you take me for. What you are in want of, you must search for elsewhere." Their conductor then came forward, saying: "We wish to be informed why the monument of the Cappelletti is thus violated by night, when a young lady of the

family has been so recently interred here? And were I not acquainted with your excellent character, Friar Lorenzo I should say you had come hither to despoil the dead." The priests having extinguished the lamp, then replied "We shall not render an account of our business to you, it is not your affair." "That is true," replied the other, "but I must report it to the prince." The friar with a feeling of despair, then cried out "Say what you please" and closing up the entrance into the tomb he went into the church with his companion.

The morning was somewhat advanced, when the friars disengaged themselves from the officers, one of whom soon related to the Cappelletti the whole of this strange affair. They, knowing that Friar Lorenzo had been very intimate with Romeo, brought him before the prince entreating, that if there were no other means he might be compelled by torture to confess his reason for opening the sepulchre of the Cappelletti. The prince having placed him under a strict guard, proceeded to interrogate him wherefore he had visited the tomb of the Cappelletti, as he was resolved to discover the truth. "I will confess every thing very freely," exclaimed the friar. "I was the confessor of the daughter of Messer Antonio, lately deceased in so very strange a manner. I loved her for her worth, and being compelled to be absent at the time of her interment, I went to offer up certain prayers over her remains, which when nine times repeated by my beads, have power to liberate her spirit from the pangs of purgatory. And because few appreciate or understand such matters the wretches assert that I went there for the purpose of despoiling the body. But I trust I am better known. This poor gown and girdle are enough for me, and I would not take a mite from all the treasures of the earth, much less the shrouds of the departed. They do me great wrong to suspect me of this crime. The prince would have been satisfied with this explanation had it not been for the interference of other monks who jealous of the friar, and hearing that he had been found in the monument, examined further, and found the dead body of Romeo a fact which was immediately made known to the prince while still speaking to the friar. This appeared incredible to every one present, and excited the utmost amazement through the city. The friar, then, aware that it would be in vain further to conceal his knowledge of the affair, fell at the feet of His Excellency, crying 'Pardon, oh, pardon most noble prince!' I have said what is not truth, yet neither for

any evil purpose, nor for love of gain have I said it, but to preserve my faith entire, which I promised to two deceased and unhappy lovers." On this, the friar was compelled to repeat the whole of the preceding tale. The prince, moved almost to tears as he listened, set out with a vast train of people to the monument of the family, and having ordered the bodies of the lovers to be placed in the church of San Francesco, he summoned their fathers and friends to attend. There was now a fresh burst of sorrow springing from a double source. Although the parties had been the bitterest enemies, they embraced one another in tears; and the scene before them suddenly wrought that change in their hearts and feelings, which neither the threats of their prince, nor the prayers of their friends, had been able to accomplish. Their hatred became extinguished in the mingled blood of their unhappy children. A noble monument was erected to their memory, on which was inscribed the occasion of their death; and their bodies were entombed together with great splendour and solemnity, and wept over, no less by their friends and relatives, than by the whole afflicted city. Such a fearful close had the loves of Romeo and Juliet; such as you have heard, and as it was related to me by Pellegrino da Verona.

But whither art thou now fled, sweet piety and faith in woman? What living instance could we boast of that truth, proved unto death, shown by Juliet to her Romeo? Can it be, that her promises shall not soon be sung by the most eloquent and gifted tongues? How many are there, who in these times, instead of falling by the side of their departed lovers, would have turned their thoughts only to obtaining others? For if I now hold them capable, against every obligation of fidelity and true service, of rejecting those who once were dear to them, when they become oppressed by fortune, what are we to believe their conduct would be, after their death? Unfortunate are the lovers of this age, who can never flatter themselves, either by long devoted service, or by yielding up their very lives, that their ladies will consent to die with them. They are rather on the other hand assured that they are no further objects of regard, than inasmuch as they devote themselves altogether to the good will and pleasure of their ladies.

# MERRIE PRANCKES

COUNT BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE

SUCH merrie pranckes we see dayly, but among the rest they be pleasant that at the first make a man agast and after that end in a matter of suretie because he that was deceived laugheth at himself when he perceiveth he was asfeard of nothing

As lving upon a time in Paglia, there chanced to be in the venie same inne three other good fellowes two of Pistoia and one of Prato which after supper (as the manner is for the most part) fell to gaming And not long after one of the Pistorians losing his rest had not a farthing left him to blesse him selfe but beganne to chafe to curse and to banne and to blaspheme terribly and thus tearing of God he went to bedde The other two after they had played a while, agreed to worke a merrie prancke with him that was gone to bed

And when they perceived that he was fallen in sleepe, they blew e out the candels and raked up the fire and beganne to speake aloud and to make the greatest hurly burly in the world making wise to contend together about their game The one saide Thou tookest the card underneath The other denyng it saide Thou hast vied upon flush, let us mount and such other matters with such noise that he that slept awoke, and hearing them at play and talking even as though they had seene the cardes did a litle open his eyes when hee saw there was no manner light in the chamber, he saide What a diuel meane you to cry thus all night?

Afterwarde hee laude him downe againe to sleepe The other two companions gave him no manner answer but still continued in their purpose untill he awoke better and much wondred and when he sawe for certaintie that there was neither fire nor any kinde of light and perceived they played still and fell in contention he said

And how can ye see the cardes without light? The one of the two answered I weene thou hast lost thy sight as well as thy money Seest thou not that wee have here two candles?

He that was in bedde lif up himselfe upo his elbowes and in a manner angred said Either I am dronken or blinde or els you make a lye The two arose and went to ye bed darkelong

laughing and making wise to believe that he went about to mocke them. And he againe saide to them: I tell you truth I see you not. At length the two began to wonder much, and the one said to the other: By good Lord, I believe he speaketh in good earnest, reach me the candle, and let us see lest perhaps hee have some impediment in his sight.

Then thought the poore wretch surely that hee had beene blinde, and weeping downe right, saide: Oh sirs, I am blind, and forthwith hee beganne to call upon our Ladie of Loreto and to beseech her to pardon him his blasphemies and cursing for the losse of his money.

But his two companions put him in good comfort and saide: It is not possible but thou shouldest see us. It is some fancie that thou hast conceived in thine head. Oh good Lorde, answered the other, it is no fancie, nor I see no more than if I had never had eyes in my head. Thy sight is cleare enough, quoth the two. And the one saide to the other:

Marke how well he openeth his eyes: and how faire they be to looke to: and who would believe but he coulde see? The pore soule wept faster, and cryed God mercie.

In conclusion they saide unto him: See thou make a vow to goe devoutly to our Ladie of Loreto barefooted and barelegged, for that is the best remedie that may be had. And in the mean space we will goe to Aquapendente and the other townes here about to seeke for some Plisition, and will helpe thee in what we can.

Then did the sillie soule kneele upon his knees in the bed, and with abundance of teares and very bitter repentance for his blaspheming, made a solemne vow to goe naked to our Ladie of Loreto and to offer unto her a pair of eyes of silver, and to eate no flesh upon the Wednesday, nor egges upon Friday, and to fast bread and water every Saterdag in worship of our Ladie, if she give him the grace to receive his sight againe.

The two companions entring into an other chamber, lighted a candel, and came with the greatest laughter in the world before this poore soule, who for all he was rid of so great an anguish as you may thinke he had, yet was he so astonied with his former feare, that he could not only not laugh, but not once speake a word, and the two companions did nothing else but stur him, saying that hee was bounde to perfourme all those vows, for that hee had received the grace he asked.

*Translated by Sir Thomas Hoby (1530-1566).*

## BELPHAGOR

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

WE read in the ancient archives of Florence the following account as it was received from the lips of a very holy man greatly respected by every one for the sanctity of his manners at the period in which he lived. Happening once to be deeply absorbed in his prayers such was their efficacy that he saw an infinite number of condemned souls belonging to those miserable mortals who had died in their sins undergoing the punishment due to their offences in the regions below. He remarked that the greater part of them lamented nothing so bitterly as their folly in having taken wives attributing to them the whole of their misfortunes. Much surprised at this Minos and Rhadamanthus with the rest of the infernal judges unwilling to credit all the abuse heaped upon the female sex and wearied from day to day with its repetition agreed to bring the matter before Pluto. It was then resolved that the conclave of infernal princes should form a committee of inquiry and should adopt such measures as might be deemed most advisable by the court in order to discover the truth or falsehood of the calumnies which they heard. All being assembled in council Pluto addressed them as follows. Dearly beloved demons though by celestial dispensation and the irreversible decree of fate this kingdom fell to my share and I might strictly dispense with any kind of celestial or earthly responsibility yet as it is more prudent and respectful to consult the laws and to hear the opinion of others I have resolved to be guided by your advice particularly in a case that may chance to cast some imputation upon our government. For the souls of all men daily arriving in our kingdom still continue to lay the whole blame upon their wives and as this appears to us impossible we must be careful how we decide in such a business lest we also should come in for a share of their abuse on account of our too great severity and yet judgment must be pronounced

lest we be taxed with negligence, and with indifference to the interests of justice. Now as the latter is the default of a careless, and the former of an unjust judge, we, wishing to avoid the trouble and the blame that might attach to both, yet hardly seeing how to get clear of it, naturally enough apply to you for assistance, in order that you may look to it, and contrive in some way, that as we have hitherto reigned, without the slightest imputation upon our character, we may continue to do so for the future."

The affair appearing to be of the utmost importance to all the princes present, they first resolved that it was necessary to ascertain the truth, though they differed as to the best means of accomplishing this object. Some were of opinion that they ought to choose one, or more, from among themselves, who should be commissioned to pay a visit to the world, and in a human shape endeavour personally to ascertain how far such reports were grounded in truth. To many others it appeared that this might be done without so much trouble, merely by compelling some of the wretched souls to confess the truth by the application of a variety of tortures. But the majority being in favour of a journey to the world, they abided by the former proposal. No one, however, being ambitious of undertaking such a task, it was resolved to leave the affair to chance. The lot fell upon the arch-devil Belphegor, who, previous to the fall, had enjoyed the rank of archangel in a higher world. Though he received his commission with a very ill grace, he, nevertheless, felt himself constrained by Pluto's imperial mandate, and prepared to execute whatever had been determined upon in council. At the same time he took an oath, to observe the tenor of his instructions, as they had been drawn up with all due solemnity and ceremony for the purpose of his mission. These were to the following effect: *Imprimis*, that the better to promote the object in view, he should be furnished with a hundred thousand gold ducats; secondly, that he should make use of the utmost expedition in getting into the world; thirdly, that after assuming the human form he should enter into the marriage state; and lastly, that he should live with his wife for the space of ten years. At the expiration of this period he was to feign death, and return home, in order to acquaint his employers, by the fruits of experience, what really were the respective conveniences and inconveniences of matrimony. The conditions further ran, that during the said ten

years he should be subject to all kinds of miseries and disasters, like the rest of mankind, such as poverty, prisons, and diseases into which men are apt to fall, unless, indeed, he could contrive by his own skill and ingenuity to avoid them. Poor Belphegor having signed these conditions and received the money, forthwith came into the world, and having set up his equipage, with a numerous train of servants, he made a very splendid entrance into Florence. He selected this city in preference to all others, as being most favourable for obtaining a usurious interest of his money, and having assumed the name of Roderigo, a native of Castile, he took a house in the suburbs of Ognissanti. And because he was unable to explain the instructions under which he acted, he gave out that he was a merchant, who having had poor prospects in Spain, had gone to Syria, and succeeded in acquiring his fortune at Aleppo, whence he had lastly set out for Italy, with the intention of marrying and settling there as one of the most polished and agreeable countries he knew.

Roderigo was certainly a very handsome man, apparently about thirty years of age, and he lived in a style of life that showed he was in pretty easy circumstances, if not possessed of immense wealth. Being moreover, extremely affable and liberal he soon attracted the notice of many noble citizens, blessed with large families of daughters, and small incomes. The former of these were soon offered to him, from among whom Roderigo chose a very beautiful girl of the name of Onesta a daughter of Amerigo Donati who had also three sons, all grown up and three more daughters also nearly marriageable. Though of a noble family and enjoying a good reputation in Florence, his father in law was extremely poor, and maintained as poor an establishment. Roderigo, therefore, made very splendid nuptials, and omitted nothing that might tend to confer honour upon such a festival being liable, under the law which he received on leaving his infernal abode, to feel all kinds of vain and earthly passions. He, therefore, soon began to enter into all the pomps and vanities of the world and to aim at reputation and consideration among mankind, which put him to no little expense. But more than this he had not long enjoyed the society of his beloved Onesta, before he became tenderly attached to her, and was unable to behold her suffer the slightest inquietude or vexation. Now, along with her other gifts of beauty and nobility, the lady had brought unto the house of

Roderigo such an insufferable portion of pride, that in this respect Lucifer himself could not equal her; for her husband, who had experienced the effects of both, was at no loss to decide which was the most intolerable of the two. Yet it became infinitely worse, when she discovered the extent of Roderigo's attachment to her, of which she availed herself to obtain an ascendancy over him, and rule him with a rod of iron. Not content with this, when she found he would bear it, she continued to annoy him with all kinds of insults and taunts, in such a way as to give him the most indescribable pain and uneasiness. For, what with the influence of her father, her brothers, her friends, and relatives, the duty of the matrimonial yoke, and the love he bore her, he suffered all, for some time, with the patience of a saint. It would be useless to recount the follies and extravagancies into which he ran in order to gratify her taste for dress, and every article of the newest fashion in which our city, ever so variable in its nature, according to its usual habits, so much abounds. Yet to live upon easy terms with her, he was obliged to do more than this; he had to assist his father-in-law in portioning off his other daughters; and she next asked him to furnish one of her brothers with goods to sail for the Levant, another with silks for the west, while a third was to be set up in a goldbeater's establishment at Florence. In such objects the greatest part of his fortune was soon consumed. At length the carnival season was at hand; the festival of St. John was to be celebrated, and the whole city, as usual, was in a ferment. Numbers of the noblest families were about to vie with each other in the splendour of their parties; and the Lady Onesta, being resolved not to be outshone by her acquaintance, insisted that Roderigo should exceed them all in the richness of their feasts. For the reasons above stated, he submitted to her will; nor, indeed, would he have scrupled at doing much more, however difficult it might have been, could he have flattered himself with a hope of preserving the peace and comfort of his household, and of awaiting quietly the consummation of his ruin. But this was not the case, inasmuch as the arrogant temper of his wife had grown to such a height of asperity by long indulgence, that he was at a loss in what way to act. His domestics, male and female, would no longer remain in the house, being unable to support, for any length of time, the intolerable life they led. The inconvenience which he suffered in consequence of having no one to

whom he could entrust his affairs, it is impossible to express. Even his own familiar devils whom he had brought along with him had already deserted him choosing to return below, rather than longer submit to the tyranny of his wife. Left then to himself, amidst this turbulent and unhappy life, and having dissipated all the ready money he possessed, he was compelled to live upon the hopes of the returns expected from his ventures in the east and the west. Being still in good credit, in order to support his rank he resorted to bills of exchange nor was it long before accounts running against him, he found himself in the same situation as many other unhappy speculators in that market. Just as his case became extremely delicate, there arrived sudden tidings both from east and west, that one of his wife's brothers had dissipated the whole of Rodrigo's profits in play and that while the other was returning with a rich cargo, uninsured his ship had the misfortune to be wrecked, and he himself was lost. No sooner did this affair transpire, than his creditors assembled and supposing it must be all over with him though their bills had not yet become due they resolved to keep a strict watch over him in fear that he might abscond. Rodrigo on his part thinking that there was no other remedy, and feeling how deeply he was bound by the Stygian law, determined at all hazards to make his escape. So taking horse one morning early as he luckily lived near the Prato Gate in that direction he went off. His departure was soon known the creditors were all in a bustle, the magistrates were applied to, and the officers of justice along with a great part of the populace were dispatched in pursuit. Rodrigo had hardly proceeded a mile before he heard this hue and cry, and the pursuers were soon so close at his heels that the only resource he had left was to abandon the high road and take to the open country, with the hope of concealing himself in the fields. But finding himself unable to make way over the hedges and ditches he left his horse and took to his heels traversing fields of vines and canes until he reached Peretola where he entered the house of Matteo del Bricea a labourer of Giovanni del Bene. Finding him at home for he was busily providing fodder for his cattle our hero earnestly entreated him to save him from the hands of his adversaries close behind, who would infallibly starve him to death in a dungeon engaging that if Matteo would give him refuge he would make him one of the richest men alive, and afford him such proofs of it before he took his leave as

would convince him of the truth of what he said. And if he failed to do this, he was quite content that Matteo himself should deliver him into the hands of his enemies.

Now Matteo, although a rustic, was a man of courage, and concluding that he could not lose anything by the speculation, he gave him his hand, and agreed to save him. He then thrust our hero under a heap of rubbish, completely enveloping him in weeds; so that when his pursuers arrived, they found themselves quite at a loss; nor could they extract from Matteo the least information as to his appearance. In this dilemma there was nothing left for them but to proceed in the pursuit, which they continued for two days, and then returned, jaded and disappointed, to Florence. In the meanwhile, Matteo drew out hero from his hiding-place, and begged him to fulfil his engagement. To this his friend Roderigo replied: "I confess, brother, that I am under great obligations to you, and I mean to return them. To leave no doubt upon your mind, I will inform you who I am"; and he proceeded to acquaint him with all the particulars of the affair: how he had come into the world, and married, and run away. He next described to his preserver the way in which he might become rich, which was briefly as follows. As soon as Matteo should hear of some lady in the neighbourhood being said to be possessed, he was to conclude that it was Roderigo himself who had taken possession of her; and he gave him his word, at the same time, that he would never leave her, until Matteo should come, and conjure him to depart. In this way he might obtain what sum he pleased from the lady's friends for the price of exorcising her; and having mutually agreed upon this plan, Roderigo disappeared.

Not many days elapsed before it was reported in Florence that the daughter of Messer Ambrogio Amedei, a lady married to Buonajuto Tebalducci, was possessed by the devil. Her relations did not fail to apply every means usual on such occasions, to expel him, such as making her wear upon her head Saint Zanobi's cap, and the cloak of Saint John of Gualberto; but these had only the effect of making Roderigo laugh. And to convince them that it was really a spirit that possessed her, and that it was no flight of the imagination, he made the young lady talk Latin, hold a philosophical dispute, and reveal the frailties of many of her acquaintance. He particularly accused a certain friar of having introduced a lady into his monastery in male attire, to the no small scandal of all who heard it, and the

astonishment of the brotherhood Messer Ambrogio found it impossible to silence him and began to despair of his daughter's cure. But the news reaching Matteo he lost no time in waiting upon Ambrogio assuring him of his daughter's recovery on condition of his paying him five hundred florins with which to purchase a farm at Peretola. To this Messer Ambrogio consented and Matteo immediately ordered a number of masses to be said after which he proceeded with some unmeaning ceremonies calculated to give solemnity to his task. Then approaching the young lady he whispered in her ear. Roderigo it is Matteo that is come. So do as we agreed upon and get out. Roderigo replied. It is all well, but you have not asked enough to make you a rich man. So when I depart I will take possession of the daughter of Charles King of Naples and I will not leave her till you come. You may then demand whatever you please for your reward and mind that you never trouble me again. And when he had said thus he went out of the lady to the no small delight and amazement of the whole city of Florence.

It was not long again before the accident that had happened to the daughter of the King of Naples began to be huzzed about the country and all the monkish remedies having been found to fail the king hearing of Matteo sent for him from Florence. On arriving at Naples Matteo after a few ceremonies performed the cure. Before leaving the princess, however, Roderigo said. You see Matteo I have kept my promise and made a rich man of you and I owe you nothing now. So henceforward you will take care to keep out of my way, lest as I have hitherto done you some good just the contrary should happen to you in future. Upon this Matteo thought it best to return to Florence after receiving fifty thousand ducats from His Majesty in order to enjoy his riches in peace and never once imagined that Roderigo would come in his way again. But in this he was deceived for he soon heard that a daughter of Louis King of France was possessed by an evil spirit which disturbed our friend Matteo not a little thinking of His Majesty's great authority and of what Roderigo had said. Hearing of Matteo's great skill and finding no other remedy the king dispatched a messenger for him whom Matteo contrived to send back with a variety of excuses. But this did not long avail him the king applied to the Florentine council and our hero was compelled to attend. Arriving with no very pleasant sensations at Paris

he was introduced into the royal presence, when he assured His Majesty that though it was true he had acquired some fame in the course of his demoniac practice, he could by no means always boast of success: and that some devils were of such a desperate character, as not to pay the least attention to threats, enchantments, or even the exorcisms of religion itself. He would nevertheless do His Majesty's pleasure, entreating at the same time to be held excused, if it should happen to prove an obstinate case. To this the king made answer, that be the case what it might, he would certainly hang him if he did not succeed. It is impossible to describe poor Matteo's terror and perplexity on hearing these words; but at length mustering courage, he ordered the possessed princess to be brought into his presence. Approaching as usual close to her ear, he conjured Roderigo in the most humble terms, by all he had ever done for him, not to abandon him in such a dilemma; but to show some sense of gratitude for past services, and to leave the princess. "Ah! thou traitorous villain!" cried Roderigo, "hast thou, indeed, ventured to meddle in this business? Dost thou boast thyself a rich man at my expense? I will now convince the world and thee of the extent of my power, both to give and to take away. I shall have the pleasure of seeing thee hanged before thou leavest this place." Poor Matteo, finding there was no remedy, said nothing more; but like a wise man, set his head to work, in order to discover some other means of expelling the spirit; for which purpose he said to the king: "Sire, it is as I feared: there are certain spirits of so malignant a character, that there is no keeping any terms with them, and this is one of them. However, I will make a last attempt, and I trust that it will succeed according to our wishes. If not, I am in Your Majesty's power, and I hope you will take compassion on my innocence.

"In the first place, I have to entreat that Your Majesty will order a large stage to be erected in the centre of the great square, such as will admit the nobility and clergy of the whole city. The stage ought to be adorned with all kinds of silks, and with cloth of gold, and with an altar raised in the middle. To-morrow morning I would have Your Majesty, with your full train of lords and ecclesiastics in attendance, seated in order, and in magnificent array, as spectators of the scene, at the said place. There, after having celebrated solemn mass, the possessed princess must appear: but I have in particular to entreat, that

on one side of the square may be stationed a band of men with drums, trumpets horns, tambours, bagpipes, cymbals, and kettledrums and all other kinds of instruments that make the most infernal noise Now, when I take my hat off, let the whole band strike up, and approach with the most horrid uproar towards the stage This, along with a few other secret remedies which I shall apply will surely compel the spirit to depart

These preparations were accordingly made by the royal command and when the day, being Sunday morning arrived, the stage was seen crowded with people of rank and the square with the people Mass was celebrated, and the possessed princess conducted between two bishops, with a train of nobles, to the spot. Now when Rodengo beheld so vast a concourse of people, together with all this awful preparation, he was almost struck dumb with astonishment and said to himself 'I wonder what that cowardly wretch is thinking of doing now? Does he imagine I have never seen finer things than these in the regions above? Aye and more horrid things below However, I will soon make him repent it at all events.' Matteo then approaching him besought him to come out, but Rodengo replied 'Oh, you think you have done a fine thing now! What do you mean to do with all this trumpery? Can you escape my power, think you in this way or elude the vengeance of the king? Thou poltroon villain, I will have thee hanged for this!' And as Matteo continued the more to entreat him, his adversary still vilified him in the same strain. So Matteo believing there was no time to be lost made the sign with his hat, when all the musicians who had been stationed there for the purpose, suddenly struck up a hideous din and ringing a thousand peals, approached the spot Rodengo pricked up his ears at the sound, quite at a loss what to think and rather in a perturbed tone of voice, he asked Matteo what it meant To this the latter returned apparently much alarmed 'Alas, dear Rodengo, it is your wife, she is coming for you' It is impossible to give an idea of the anguish of Rodengo's mind and the strange alteration which his feelings underwent at that name The moment the name of wife was pronounced he had no longer presence of mind to consider whether it were probable or even possible, that it could be her Without replying a single word, he leaped out and fled in the utmost terror, leaving the lady to herself, and preferring rather to return to his infernal abode, and render an account of his adventures, *than run the risk of any further*

sufferings and vexations under the matrimonial yoke. And thus Belphegor again made his appearance in the infernal domains, bearing ample testimony to the evils introduced into a household by a wife; while Matteo, on his part, who knew more of the matter than the devil, returned triumphantly home, not a little proud of the victory he had achieved.

## THE FALSE CARDINAL

GIOVANNI BREVIO

THERE was formerly a priest of Piperno, named Antonio, but ill deserving of the sacred character inasmuch as, from his earliest youth he evinced a decided disposition to defraud and to impose upon the unwary, which he effected in a variety of ways. Having occasion once to leave Piperno, he repaired to Naples and it there occurred to him to put into practice one of the happiest tricks he had ever invented, for which purpose he made preparations to depart for Rome. Before taking his leave of Naples, he entreated Angelo Romano, who had long resided there to furnish him with a letter of introduction to his brother Luca a saddler, living at Rome, in order that he might pay some little attentions to him, a request with which Romano immediately complied. Having accordingly obtained the letter he proceeded on his way, and on approaching Rome began to examine its contents. Imagining that it was wanting in warmth of recommendation and encomium he thought it most advisable to compose another in its place, which he soon produced in a very happy imitation of the hand of Angelo, to the following tenor. Dear brother Luca! You will receive this from the hands of His Excellency, a very kind patron of mine who is now, for certain important reasons, travelling incognito on some very urgent affairs, into France. He is a noble prelate holding several rich benefices, and the Superior of many monasteries in the Cremonese, as well as in Avignon though I do not just at present recollect the name of his see. You will therefore, take care, for your own sake to show him every possible respect and attention when perhaps you may be happy enough to induce him to take up his residence at your house while he remains at Rome. He brings with him only two servants, but more will shortly follow from this place as well as from Cremona and Piacenza. He will stay in Rome during some days and you must dispose of the horses as you can best contrive. Should you not be in a situation from your

late losses to treat him in a manner worthy of his rank, I would advise you to mortgage everything you possess, to show your wish to please him, as you may depend upon it, you will find your interest in so doing. Not that he himself stands in need of such a reception; for would to heaven our whole fortune equalled what he carries along with him: but the truth is, you will find your account in it. You know the old saying: 'It is well to bait with a little fish to catch a great one.' (*E buono gettar una sardella per prendere un luccio.*) He knows you are one of my family, and that you have a fine boy about fifteen years old, whom he told me he should be very glad to bring forward in the world. He will not fail to be of use to us in our difficulties, for he is certainly well inclined towards us. At least your Marc Antonio will come in for one of his benefices. This distinguished prelate has already resided above three weeks at my house, and is quite sensible of the services I have, during the whole of that time, rendered him."

Having fabricated this masterpiece of rhetoric, he arrived about twilight near the Piazza Giudea, where he sold one of his old mantles to a certain Jew, and with the proceeds of his ancient suit, purchased an embroidered shirt, which he threw over him without any further dress, the better to carry his design into execution. For had he ventured to make his appearance in his own coarse habiliments, the imposition would have been discovered in a moment. Now, however, he advanced with confidence, as it was night, towards the residence of Luca; to whom, finding him at home, he delivered the letter. Luca had scarcely perused it, when the bishop began to tell a dreadful story of his having been set upon and robbed by banditti, who had slain his two servants, endeavouring to defend their master, while he had with difficulty escaped. His appearance, no less than the letter, certainly verified his assertion. Observing his forlorn condition, Luca, in a compassionate tone, addressed him: "My lord, your Excellency is very welcome"; to which his reverence replied: "Do not, friend, give me any titles; but simply call me Cardinal; my name is Adriano": imposing on the credulity of the saddler, that he was the cardinal of that name, who had travelled into Turkey. Reassured by the tone of the feigned cardinal, his host now lavished upon him every attention in his power, saying: "You do me honour, cardinal, to take up your residence in my poor house, where you may rely upon us all as being wholly devoted to your

service Poor as it is, you must therefore consider my house as your own and I am only concerned to think, that since the sack of this noble city, I do not find myself in circumstances to offer you a more splendid reception But I trust my best efforts will not be wanting to supply those deficiencies, which I am aware your Excellency must perceive, if your infinite goodness will deign as my brother flatters me you will, to accept my attentions' His grace here returned his thanks in the most condescending manner though he still sat with a somewhat serious and sombre countenance, on which Luca respectfully ventured to throw one of his best cloaks over his reverend shoulders cherishing the vital warmth until such time as a hot supper and a warm chamber could be prepared for him For this laudable purpose he gave up his own room, into which when the cardinal had finished his supper, he was respectfully shown by the lady of the house herself A bath was then ordered for the good cardinal's feet, with all kinds of sweet ointments and herbs, together with a flagon of Greek wine to invite him to repose

The next morning our happy tradesman's first visit was to his tailor's, whom he took along with him to a draper's shop where he purchased eight ells of fine cloth, part of which he paid for on the spot A casock and a large embroidered mantle were immediately presented to his reverence, and as his host imagined that his bed was not good enough for him, he ordered two new feather beds with fine sheets and hangings, while his chamber was likewise elegantly furnished and fresh perfumed His Excellency was thus greatly honoured as if he had been a real cardinal his table was heaped with all those delicacies of the season which only distinguished prelates have a right to eat and for the first few days they were truly relished by his lordship who made great havoc both among the solids and the sweets Still his host imagined that something was wanting in the treatment due to his guest's singular magnificence and worth He therefore summoned his friends and relatives, engaged in various trades to assist him in his hospitable views, and the hosier the tailor, and the shoemaker, were soon laid under contribution He invited them to his house, saying

Make haste friends make haste the hour is come for pushing all our fortunes, we shall soon be the richest family in the place no more stitching of bridles and saddles for me! They inquired in the greatest astonishment, what had happened, but

the happy tradesman was so overpowered with joy at the reflection that he was the host of the lord bishop, that he only laughed and looked proudly round him, hardly deigning to reply. But on being pressed more closely, with an air of affected humility he observed: "Why, gentlemen, if you will have it, there is a very distinguished prelate residing in my house at present; and I am very happy to see him, and always shall be; that is all. He is desirous of bestowing one of his benefices on a son of mine, and my brother also writes to me about it: indeed he introduced him to me." So confident did the poor tradesman appear, that all his relations agreed with him, and determined also, on their part, to show every kind of respect to the venerable prelate. More than a dozen of them assembled together, among whom was the host's sister-in-law, named Antonia; who on hearing of her brother's vast expectations, brought her son Gioanni with her, a youth who had been adopted into the family of Lattanzio, a Neapolitan, and treated as his own son. But his fond mother had now brighter prospects for him, and ordering him home, proceeded to offer his services to the cardinal, at whose feet she humbly knelt. The whole party, indeed, lavished upon him all those ceremonies and attentions due only to persons of the highest quality; and he was treated with beccaficos in season, and with every kind of poultry, game, pastry, and ragouts. Even the marmalade was of the finest, which appeared after dinner, and his toothpick is said to have been presented to him in a cover, accompanied with wines of the best and finest quality to be found in all the city of Rome. It is likewise reported that the celebrated cook, in the service of the friars of Santa Matelica, was the very man who was sent for to prepare the bishop's meals, under the superintendence of Catella, the wife of our honest tradesman. Here, then, did the worthy prelate feast like a wolf in the sheep-fold, rejoicing the host and his good friends and family with his saintly and benignant looks. After spending a joyous time, he began to think, as he had long flattered the ambitious hopes of his host and his brother-in-law in vain, it would be well to follow up his plan with another master-stroke of his art: for in fact the wretched tradesman was now on the point of ruin. In order to drain his last resources, the cardinal began to feign himself sick, and fairly took to his bed for more than ten days, pretending at first to refuse all nourishment, though he yielded at the same time to his strong desire for drink. Feverish as he

was, however, he contrived to devour as much as a man in health, obstinately refusing to see a physician, protesting that everything was in the hands of God, and that in fact he was much better than he deserved to be. He was, in truth, afraid that if tried by the aphorisms of Hippocrates, the language of his pulse, with his voice and looks, might convict him of his foul deceit. Requesting, therefore, that a notary might instantly be sent for, he showed an extreme desire to settle his last accounts, purposing to dispose of a vast property, which could be no loss to himself, in favour of his hospitable host and his friends. He provided for Marc Antonio, the son of Luca, the saddler, by a bequest of his rich bishopric of Montpellier in France, and to Gioanni, the son of the sister in law, he bequeathed the rectory of San Simpliciano, in the Cremonese. But to Luca, the saddler, himself, he left a thousand ducats, with only five hundred to his brother in law Bastiano, as he had to remember at the same time many of his surrounding friends, in different legacies, to be paid out of the proceeds of his benefices and other possessions, lying within the districts of Cremona and Piacenza. While he was thus pronouncing his last will and testament, with a feeble and trembling voice, his cardinal's cap being drawn quite over his eyes, and holding as it were his soul between his teeth, to keep it from taking wing, until he had settled his affairs. 'I do not wish,' he continued, "to abate a jot of the liberality which my great and magnanimous ancestors have always shown to their dying day, I would have you therefore, Mr Notary, write down that I add to the former thousand, five hundred more ducats, in behalf of Signor Luca, the saddler", whose joy, and that of the whole family, on hearing his beneficent intentions, became quite inexpressible. The reverend father now thought fit to recover very rapidly, which convinced his new friends that he had an excellent constitution, and as the time was fast approaching when he intended to depart from Rome, accompanied by some of these simple people, into France, in order to confirm them in their credulity, he ordered a large house to be taken for him in Rome to receive him on his return. This was directly done, and very well furnished with all that was befitting a man of rank, being the next house to that which formerly belonged to Melchior Barlasina. The wife of Luca, in the idea that her son Marc Antonio would soon be made a bishop, a hat becoming such an office having been already, by the cardinal's advice, procured, presented four

handsome rings, all she had in the world, to be worn by his reverence, as a slight token of her gratitude for his patronage of her son. Her sister Antonia likewise, in consideration of the rectory given to her boy Gioanni, presented him with four fine cambric shirts, and several pair of rich embroidered stockings. And though these were but insignificant proofs of their sense of the high worth and dignity of His Excellency, he nevertheless deigned to accept them, without the least symptom of pride or haughtiness. Nor was this the extent of the poor infatuated tradesman's folly; for just before the departure of his reverence, he sold a fine vine in his possession at San Bastiano, for two hundred ducats, though it was well worth three hundred, to show his gratitude for the cardinal's will.

But Providence, which soon or late is sure to bring the greatest iniquities to light, revealed, on this occasion, the daring imposition practised by this wretch, in the following manner. The sister-in-law of Luca had, as was before stated, recommended her son to the patronage of the mock cardinal, withdrawing him from the care of his former friend, who was much displeased at such a step, on account of the great pains which had been bestowed in his education. So far was he incensed by such ungrateful conduct, that he was resolved to obtain redress. He frequently sent to his mother, Antonia, to learn what had become of him, who, professing great sorrow at his absence, replied, that he had not lately called at her house. He then went in search of him, half afraid lest the soldiers, of which the place was full, had led him astray, as he was a tall and pleasing youth, well fitted to become one of their body. And it so happened that this youth, Gioanni, and his master, Lattanzio, encountered each other upon the bridge, as the boy was hastening to purchase fruits for the lord cardinal. Lattanzio immediately cried: "Come here, you little glutton! What are you doing? and why have you run away from me?" The boy replied: "Because my mother has found me a situation with a great lord, who is staying in the house of Luca, the saddler, near the palace of Sienna." His master then tried to persuade him to return home with him, when the youth took to his heels, and left him; on which Lattanzio immediately went in person to the house of Antonia, to upbraid her with her strange and ungrateful conduct. "You appeared to have been satisfied," he continued, "with the kindness I showed your son, having treated him always as if he had been one of the family. And

who is this person residing at present with your brother in law, who seems to have deprived me of the boy's affection? Let him be sent back to me instantly, for I am determined it shall be done

Having no better excuse to make, the lady replied that she knew nothing about the matter, and then turned her back upon him with an air of disdain, believing that Gioanni was secure of the cardinal's good graces and that Lattanzio might easily provide himself with another apprentice. She expected, too, that her son would make her little presents out of the proceeds of his rectory of such ornaments and dresses as would be very agreeable to her. Further incensed by this repulse, Lattanzio had recourse the same evening to the assistance of a magistrate just as the impostor was preparing to set out from Rome with the tradesman and his associates. Without any knowledge of the real particulars he stated, very truly, that there resided at the house of Luca a man of extremely bad character, and one of the greatest cheats upon the face of the earth. In consequence of this timely representation, the police were ordered to pay a visit to the tradesman's house where they found the cardinal on the point of setting out four horses standing saddled at the door the best of which was for the cardinal's own person and the other three for his companions who were now carried with their patron to the prison of Tor di Nona. Luca was first of all interrogated by the magistrate as to the business of the said impostor at his house, and whether they were going together? To this the poor tradesman replied that his brother had written to him very fully from Naples warmly recommending his lordship whom had they better known they would not perhaps have ventured to use so unceremoniously as they had done. The magistrate then commanded him to produce the letter and detecting the forgery from the affectation and bombast of its style he ordered the cardinal to be put to the question in order to obtain clear information as to his designs and character. Having an extreme aversion to the honour of martyrdom and being an experienced old rogue he instantly confessed the manner in which he had counterfeited the real letter as well as the whole series of impostures he had since practised on this credulous family. He even developed his future plans of installing the son in his clerical office of carrying them to visit his bishopric through Montpellier and into France, where he intended likewise to ordain Marc Antonio flattering

them with the hope of receiving immense fortunes, while they continued to lavish upon him the whole of their remaining substance; and as they journeyed from place to place, he intended to weave new plots to impose upon them and their companions.

On hearing this, the judge immediately ordered his poor victims to be liberated, first inquiring of them the particulars of the lord bishop's conduct when he arrived at their house; and he was shocked to hear how he had come among them quite destitute, the grave solemnity with which he had presented the letter, his continual feasting, the dignified importance with which he commanded their services, ordering his toothpick case to be brought in a cover; leaving his abode only in the morning and the evening under pretence of going to mass; and entreating his host to call him simply by the name of Adriano, meaning to represent himself as Cardinal Adriano, at that time leaving Rome. But when the narrator came to the story of the will, with all the items and particulars of his legacies, the judge and the whole court were convulsed with laughter. Then there was the cassock, the gold rings presented to him by the lady, the young cardinal's hat prepared for Marc Antonio, and the fine embroidered shirts, set down to the account of the young Gioanni's rectory. Most of the stolen goods were recovered, rather by good fortune than by any sort of prudence on the part of the family, His Excellency not being now in a situation to lay his hands upon them, though they waited, ready packed at the door, to be transported to another country. The rings, however, were gone; and it was in vain that the poor lady urged her claims before the magistrate; the rogue, steadfast as a tower, denied all knowledge of them, and she was compelled to submit patiently to her fate, especially as the cardinal swore to it in so solemn a manner. Having at length heard the whole cause, the judge pronounced his sentence, and the lord cardinal was condemned to have his ears cut off on the next Saturday morning, and to be well scourged; while Luca, the saddler, was sentenced to reopen his shop, and renew his labours on bridles and saddles; and his brother-in-law, Bastiano, the shoemaker, to return to his last. Lattanzio was directed to seize upon his apprentice, Gioanni; and Marc Antonio, as not yet being of an age to assume the duties of his bishopric, was compelled to wait until he should arrive at years of discretion.

## TOMMASO'S TRICK

GIROLAMO PARABOSCO

THERE ONCE resided in the beautiful city of Brescia, a certain youth of the name of Tommaso de Tommasi sprung from one of the most wealthy and ancient families of that place, but unfortunately addicted to those pursuits into which high spirited and thoughtless young men are too apt to fall. Careless of the consequences which attend their dissipated and licentious course of life they yield themselves up an easy prey to every variety of gambling intrigue and boon companionship, as if they were more desirous of lavishing their regards upon cut throats, parasites and buffoons than upon men of worth. These reprobates with false and adulatory arts, are incessantly on the watch to impose upon and to ruin such credulous youths as listen to them and when they once get their victims entangled in their snares they prey upon the fortunes both of them and of their families until scarcely a wreck is left. Such unfortunately, were the companions of this easy but spirited youth who in the course of four years dissipated almost all his fortune, a little country seat being the sole remaining property which he could call his own. It was situated in the vicinity of the city, on the declivity of one of those mild and pleasant hills many of which are in the possession of different nobles, who have fixed upon them for the beauty of their site and views, and these charming residences, resembling little paradises of pleasure rather than places of domestic abode, are called *Romchi*. Out of all his noble villas and other houses, this then was the only little place now left him, and as it had been intended rather for a garden of delights, full of sweet fruits and flowers, than a source of profit in grain and wines, so it ill supplied its master's personal expenses much less his usual establishment of hawks and dogs buffoons and parasites with other companions fully as expensive as these. Having become too late aware of the consequences of his conduct he resolved, through fear of the disgrace he should incur in the eyes of all his friends, who too

well knew the habits into which he had fallen, to abandon the birthplace of his ancestors altogether. With these views he determined to dispose of his little estate and a cottage adjoining, on the most advantageous terms he could obtain, without paying much regard to the honesty and propriety of his measures. Avoiding any public notice, he contrived to give some individuals a knowledge of his intentions, requesting as a favour that each would have the goodness to say nothing to his friends on the subject; and in this way he soon received considerable deposits from a number of different individuals who were desirous of purchasing the residence, without saying a word to each other. Having thus amassed a large sum of money, he soon after availed himself of an opportunity of disposing of the property altogether, and obtaining its full value, in addition to the earnest-money which he had already received. But just as he was on the point of setting out with the proceeds in his hands, the whole transaction came to light, on which he was instantly seized and thrown into prison. His sole concern when he was there seemed to be, how he could possibly contrive to retain possession of his treasure, and obtain his liberty. For this purpose he sent in haste for his attorney, who had been the boon companion of his pleasures during his prosperity, and to him he communicated his views; though the man of law had expressed no little reluctance to attend, and to take his instructions on the subject, believing there was now an end to his client's business for ever. Having approached the prison gate, Tommaso very politely saluted him as formerly, on which the notary condoled with him, and inquired in what way he could be of service to him? "You know," replied Tommaso, "the liberal manner in which I have treated you, and all my other friends, as this very place can testify for me, being encaged here like a winged bird, as I am. But I shall not insist on the obligations I have laid you under, because I would willingly relieve you from their weight by begging you to take compassion on me, and assist me to procure my enlargement from this detestable spot. As you must know, at least as well as I do, what brought me here, I shall do much better than waste my time upon that subject, and shall, instead, inform you how I mean to get away, and keep possession of the proceeds of my house and farm, which I will stay here till Doomsday sooner than render up. I think you are upon good terms with our Magnifico, the Podestà, no less on account of your social wit

and humour, than of the services you rendered him while you were his agent in Venice. Now, what I wish you particularly to impress upon his magisterial mind is, that I have altogether lost my wits, on finding that I have run through my fortune in so short a time, and in so very scandalous a manner, and indeed it is almost strange I have not. I shall take care on my side to be guilty of all kinds of extravagant actions that may give probability to your story. And when you have carried me fairly through the difficulty, you will greatly oblige me by accepting of at least twenty-five gold ducats for your pains. Moreover, I shall be eternally indebted to you, and if I succeed by this contrivance in liberating myself from these gloomy walls without refunding my resources, I shall consider myself a great man yet. On thee, then, and on thee only, my friend, is my dependence, and trust me that my enlargement will be a work worthy of thy trouble."

The wary notary, one of those who possess the cunning of the serpent, without the innocence of the dove, sensible of his influence with the magistrate, and tempted by the amount of the proposed fee, gave the prisoner his hand, promising to make the most strenuous exertions to bring his friend Tommaso out of durance, without insisting upon more than five-and-twenty ducats. Apprehensive lest the prisoner should overact his part in the mad character which he intended to assume, the attorney suggested that he should make no other reply to all the questions which might be put to him, than by a single ludicrous gesture, and, repeating his injunction to this effect, he left him to adjourn to the residence of the magistrate. Being upon the pleasantest terms, he immediately entered upon a variety of amusing topics, when there suddenly appeared one of the unlucky personages whom Tommaso had imposed upon, appealing vehemently to the magistrate for redress, and demanding the restitution of his money. To him the attorney, in the gentlest possible tone, replied, turning at the same time towards his friend the Podestà "What? Is the gentleman so unfortunate, then, as to have dealings with that madman?" "Madman! What is it you talk of?" returned the creditor. "I wish he were no more wicked than he is mad." "Alas! I fear, whatever may be your opinion," said the attorney, in the calmest voice, "that he will turn out a mere idiot, and one that ought to be confined. I imagine that his unfortunate circumstances have driven him altogether out of his senses. Could I suppose,

for a moment, that our Magnifico here was acquainted with his real state, I should express my surprise that he has committed to custody for debt, a mere fool, such as this poor wretch is. I am very apprehensive, that should he really have robbed any one, or been entrusted with money, he may have thrown it into the first ditch he came near, or scattered it on the public highway." The gentleman, however, advanced arguments to prove the perfect sanity of the prisoner, and indeed that he had proved somewhat too acute; but these were so well rebutted by the evidence of the lawyer, that the magistrate, giving credit to it, ordered the accused to appear, by way of ascertaining the truth. Signor Tommaso was then brought forward, having already made a strange metamorphosis in his appearance by tearing his clothes to pieces, and being interrogated on the subject nearest his creditor's heart, gave only the manifest signs of folly recommended by his legal adviser. In a short time the rest of his creditors appeared, and bringing the same charges upon the very same grounds, and obtaining only a repetition of his antics, the Podestà, to try his sincerity, immediately ordered him to be put to the question, which, however, only elicited symptoms of fear and folly, such as he showed before the application was made. He would, in fact, almost have endured to be torn limb from limb, rather than be separated from his money. All other means adopted to obtain some kind of information from him turned out equally fruitless, and the Podestà was at length compelled by the representations of the notary, who carried the whole affair through with great skill, to sign an order for the release of his mad client, without paying anything whatever. The attorney, calling on his client the next day for the stated sum, was surprised to find he could get no other answer from him than that which he had himself taught him. By all his entreaties for the five-and-twenty ducats, he obtained nothing but the same gestures which had sufficed to exonerate him from the rest of his creditors; and the deceiver for once fell into his own trap. As he could not venture to reveal the affair, he was obliged to take the whole patiently, and of the two he was certainly the more deserving of punishment.

## DONNA AGNES' WILL

AGNOLO FIRENZUOLA

It was a privilege enjoyed by the relater of the tenth, or last story of the day, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, occasionally to leave the beaten track, and enter upon any fresh subject which might be thought most agreeable, an example, which in the present instance as I am the last in the series, I intend to follow. Proclaiming a truce, therefore, to our love adventures, which have occupied us nearly the whole of the day, I wish to amuse you with some account of a certain friar of Novara, who flourished about twenty years ago. You hardly need to be told, that, among all ranks and conditions of men, the good people to be met with are more rare than those of an opposite description, so that I trust you will not be very greatly surprised to hear, that in the holy brotherhood there are not a few who fall short of perfection and even of what the rules of their Order require. Nor ought we to think it strange that the vice of avarice, which bears such sway in the courts of princes, both spiritual and temporal, should sometimes take up her residence in the cloisters of the poor brothers.

It happened that in the town of Novara, a very pretty city of Lombardy, there dwelt a rich widow lady, whose name was Donna Agnes. She had worn her weeds with persevering sorrow ever since the death of her dear Gaudenzio de' Piotti, who, besides her dowry which was very handsome for a lady in those parts, had left her other possessions that put her very much at her ease, even though she should prefer worshipping his memory to any new connection. She had borne him, moreover, four boys whose education would now devolve upon her alone. But this excellent and considerate husband was scarcely laid at rest in the ground, before tidings of this his last will and testament reached the ears of the Superior of the convent of San Nazaro, situated a little way beyond the gate of San Agabio. This same good monk was commissioned by the society to keep an eye upon testamentary donations, so that no widow should pass him by without affording at least her

mite, and assuming the girdle of the seraphic St. Francis. Having been once admitted as lay sisters into their Order, many of these devotees were in the habit of frequenting their congregation, and offering up prayers for the souls of their deceased friends, expressing their gratitude to the poor brethren in the shape of fine Bologna sausages and pasties, and were occasionally induced, in their zeal for imitating the good works of the blessed Fra Ginepro, and other renowned saints, to endow some little chapel for the convenience of the Order, where they might represent the glorious history of St. Francis, as he was seen preaching to the birds in the desert, engaged in kneading the holy bread, or at the moment when the Angel Gabriel brought him his saintly slippers. The chapel once built, it was not very difficult to raise sufficient, from the same quarter, to defray an annual festival in honour of the saint's holy stripes, and to celebrate every Monday a mass for the souls of all his followers who might still happen to be suffering the pains of purgatory. But as, consistent with their profession of poverty, the good brethren could not openly avail themselves of these gifts, they adopted the ingenious method of endowing their holy buildings, and holding the property as appurtenant to the sacristies, imagining they could thus as easily impose upon heaven, as upon us poor credulous mortals here below. As if their real motives, and all the envy, pride, and covetousness, concealed under the large cowls of pursy monks, were not fully as evident to an all-seeing eye, as those vices that are more clearly apparent in the broad light of the day. These are they, who instead of begging their bread barefoot, or preaching to the people, as they ought to do, wherever they appear, prefer sitting at ease in their well-stored monasteries; supplied with delicate changes of shoes and linen, some five pairs of Cordova slippers, silk stockings, and sweet, dainty fare. And when they can muster sufficient exertion, or it is quite necessary for them to go abroad, they mount their mules, as elegantly attired as themselves, or pretty palfreys, whose paces are of the easiest, so as never to produce a feeling of fatigue. They are equally cautious not to burden the mind with too much study, finding the truth of the scripture observation, that it is indeed "a weariness to the flesh"; besides the holy dread they entertain, as in the case of Lucifer, of its producing pride, and thus incurring the risk of a fall from their state of monastic innocence and simplicity.

But to return to our devout inspector of the property of rich widows it is certain that he followed so closely in pursuit of the lady in question and made so much noise in his poor wooden clogs that for peace sake she was soon compelled to add her name to those of the third order, an arrangement from which the poor brethren drew a regular supply of alms, besides warm jackets and richly worked tunics. But not content with this and imagining nothing done while anything remained to do, he placed monks round her all day long, to remind her of the superior efficacy of endowing a whole chapel, if she really consulted the benefit of her soul. The lady, however having four sons at first thought it rather hard to rob them of their substance in favour of the monks and being like some of her sex, by no means liberally inclined she tried to amuse them for some time with fair words though resolved, in her own mind, to stick fast to her property. Just about the period that the good brethren imagined they had brought her over to their purpose and succeeded in obtaining the mention of their new chapel in her will it happened that she was taken suddenly unwell, and in spite of all medical assistance, died. Before breathing her last she sent in haste for the Superior of San Nazaro, to receive her dying confessions who, imagining he was now about to reap the harvest of his toils in laying such long siege to the widow's purse very frankly told her how necessary it was after having made confession, to show a little more charity towards her own soul while it remained yet in her power, and not to rely upon her sons offering up any sort of compensation for her sins in the way of alms and masses, after her decease. It was his duty to remind her of the fate of her friend Donna Leonora Caccia the wife of Messer Cervagio, doctor of laws who at the time he spoke was suffering in purgatory, through the wicked neglect of her sons, who had never burnt a single taper since the day of her funeral. Alarmed at the idea of being in a similar predicament and feeling extremely weak and troubled such was the impression of the monk's oratory, that she was just on the point of yielding her consent, and calling for her will but still balancing between the opposite interests of her soul and of her family, she declared that she would make up her mind before he should return again on the morrow. The good priest, shaking his head, reminded her of the danger of delay in a case of such paramount importance, and under pain of great future suffering hinted at the propriety

of the alteration being made before his return the next day. In the meanwhile, the widow's second son, Agabio, having in some way got scent of this negotiation, communicated his fears to his brothers, who agreed with him that it was of the utmost consequence to overhear what should take place on the priest's return. So when Fra Serafino, the Superior, arrived the next day, with the intention of concluding the bargain, Agabio took a station which enabled him to hear every word that passed; and such, he found, was the effect of the monk's eloquence, and so dreadful his denunciations of purgatory, that the poor lady was glad to receive absolution upon condition of leaving the sum of two hundred ducats, for the purpose of endowing and ornamenting a chapel. Another hundred was to be appropriated to the purchase of the sacred vessels, and other articles, requisite to the celebration of mass in proper style, besides an annual festival, and a service for the souls of the dead. To these was to be added a small farm, situated very conveniently for the use of the poor brotherhood, at Camigliano, worth at least three thousand ducats; in consideration of which, having arranged everything necessary respecting the title, and that the whole should be drawn up by a regular notary, as soon as possible, the happy monk absolved the good widow, and took his leave.

Agabio, who had heard all that passed, lost no time in acquainting his brothers, all of whom were of opinion that it was not an affair to be trifled with. So, after consulting some of their friends, they proceeded to their mother's chamber, and with some difficulty, by help of a less fastidious confessor, who absolved her on easier terms, they prevailed upon her to leave her will as it was. This done, they next dispatched a confidential servant, with a message to the wily monk in their mother's name, begging that he would no longer give himself the trouble of calling, as her sons, having got to hear the nature of his business, were bent upon doing him some grievous mischief, in case they should meet with him at her house; that she begged him at the same time not to make himself at all anxious upon the subject, as the holy brotherhood would find everything arranged to their entire satisfaction in her last bequest.

Upon receiving these tidings, Fra Serafino took the hint, and giving himself no little credit for his successful negotiation, he abstained from troubling the lady further. But in a few days he had the gratification of hearing that she had breathed her

last and directly hastened, according to his instructions, to the house of Ser Tomeno the notary, who had already been apprised by Agabio in what way he was to act. By him he was informed that he ought immediately to wait upon Agabio and his brothers into whose hands he had committed the will the day before, when he might possibly hear of something to his advantage. Without replying a single word the delighted friar hastened to inspect its contents, and after duly condoling with the young men upon their loss he came at once to the point, and requested Agabio to let him see the will. The latter, expressing his surprise at this question, requested to know the reason of his troubling himself with affairs that no way concerned him, an observation at which the holy man began to express his dissatisfaction but was threatened by Agabio with no very pleasing consequences in case he did not forthwith proceed to take sanctuary in his own monastery. Not in the least daunted, however, at this reception the wily monk made his bow with a malicious smile, and departed without deigning to say a word, and calling upon a certain Messer Niccola procurator to the order, he put five soldi into his hands and requested to know his opinion. Having heard the particulars of the case, Messer Niccola, without further hesitation sent a summons to Ser Tomeno, Agabio's notary, citing him to appear before the bishop's vicar, with a copy of the last will and testament of the deceased.

Ser Tomeno the moment he had perused this document, lost no time in acquainting Agabio with the progress of the affair, and he desiring nothing better, took his attorney along with him and called privately at the house of the vicar, who happening to be a particular friend of his, heard the whole proceedings from beginning to end the good friar's long and difficult negotiations. Agabio's stratagems to counteract him and the commencement of the present process. Now the vicar as belonging to the order of the priesthood, was by no means overburdened with affection towards the friars and expressed his satisfaction at hearing what had passed. Upon the following day, at the hour appointed for the parties to make their appearance, came Fra Serafino accompanied by the procurator of his convent, both of whom were extremely noisy, and bent upon obtaining a sight of the will immediately. Agabio in answer to their appeal said Good Messer Vicar, may it please your reverence, I have not the slightest objection to the production of the will, provided that all the parties whose names are therein mentioned

consent to fulfil the articles, according to the letter, of whatever nature they may be."

"Say no more," interrupted the vicar; "all that is very clear; for our laws are very particular on this point, and whoever comes in for the benefit, must also incur the inconvenience of such bequests. Let us have this document, then; it is only what is lawful and reasonable!" and Agabio, instantly taking a scroll out of his pocket, handed it to the opposite notary for perusal. After running over the leading particulars relating to the heirs, and several legacies inserted for the purpose of giving the whole a greater air of reality, he came to the part that concerned the friar, the tenor of which ran in the following manner: "ITEM, I will and bequeath, for the better preservation of my sons' fortune and for the general benefit of all the widows in Novara, that there be given by the hands of my own children, the amount of fifty lashes upon the back of Fra Serafino, at this time being the guardian or Superior of the convent of San Nazaro; and that the said lashes be of the best and soundest in the power of my sons' hands to inflict. And be it further stated, that these are intended to serve as an example to the rest of his brotherhood, how they venture in future to impose upon poor credulous women, or feeble old dotards, basely and maliciously persuading them to disinherit and impoverish their own flesh and blood, for the purpose of ornamenting cells and chapels."

Here the risible muscles of the notary would permit him to proceed no farther, and his laugh was speedily caught, and re-echoed through the whole court; insomuch that the poor friar, overwhelmed with ridicule and confusion, sought to make good his escape, and find the way back to his convent; though fully resolved in his own mind to bring the whole affair, in form of appeal, before the high apostolic chamber. But he was not doomed to end the matter in quite so honourable a manner, for Agabio, seizing fast hold of his gown, exclaimed: "Tarry a little, holy father! why are you in such a hurry? I am come here for the purpose of fulfilling the conditions of the will, and these must be complied with"; and then appealing to the vicar, while he held the good father tight by his band: "I require to know from you, as the judge, why Father Serafino should not be entitled to the benefit of his bequest, mounted on the great horse, and receive from my hands the amount of the legacy due to him. If this be not granted, I shall feel bound to appeal to

a superior tribunal against the undue partiality and injustice of this court " The good vicar, receiving the whole of this with an air of mock solemnity, turning towards Agabio, replied "My good Messer Agabio, your beneficent intentions respecting the worthy father, no one surely can dispute, but I dare say he will be inclined to rest satisfied with them, without insisting upon the execution of the deed, in particular, as it might possibly bring some degree of scandal upon his cloth, while at the same time that it would be painful to him, such inheritance would produce no sort of benefit to the holy brotherhood Besides, if he be so truly disinterested, as not to wish to accept the kind bequest of your mother, I hardly see how you can venture to force it upon him, and I would rather permit him to take his leave, with the noble consciousness that he bears no marks of your favour along with him "

Upon this hint Fra Serafino acted, and full of mingled rage, fear, and vexation, retreated to his own abode, which he did not again quit for many days, out of apprehension of the ridicule of the people His punishment, however, was followed by the desired effect, for, from that time forth, he was never known to solicit widow ladies for their fortunes to endow chapels, especially such as had families of soas, by whom he might again run the risk of being severely handled As it was, he had the good fortune to escape martyrdom from their hands, and contrived to digest his spleen and disappointment by patience, as every good Christian ought According, however, to a different version of the story, trumped up, it is supposed, by some of the friars, for the credit of their Order, and as I was myself informed by one of them, that same wicked vicar had soon reason to repent of the part he bore in the affair, having to pay no less a fine than five hundred florins.

## THE DUMB KNIGHT

MATTEO BANDELLO

IN the castle of Moncaliero, not far from the city of Turin, there dwelt a widow lady of the name of Zilia Duca, whose consort died before she had attained her twenty-fourth year. Though extremely beautiful, her manners were somewhat abrupt, resembling rather those of a pretty rustic, than of a polished city dame. She devoted herself to the education and future welfare of an only son, between three and four years old, and relinquished all idea of again entering into the marriage state. Entertaining somewhat narrow and avaricious views, she kept as small an establishment as she could, and performed many menial offices, usually left to the management of domestics. She rarely received or returned visits; stealing out on the appointed fasts early in the morning to attend mass at an adjoining church, and returning home in the same private manner. Now it was a general custom with the ladies in that part of the world, whenever strangers happened to arrive at their residence, to grant them a salute, by way of welcome to their roof. But the lady of whom we speak, proved for once an exception to this general and hospitable rule. For Messer Filiberto da Virle, a gentleman and a soldier of distinguished prowess and esteem, stopping at Moncaliero, on his way to Virle, chanced also to attend mass at the same church where Madonna Zilia was to be seen. Charmed with her graceful and attractive air, no less than with the beauty of her countenance, he eagerly inquired who she was; and though little pleased with the avaricious character which he heard attributed to her, he tried in vain to efface the impression she had made. He pursued, however, his journey to Virle, where, after transacting his affairs, he resolved to retrace his steps to Moncaliero, not very far distant, and take up his residence there for some time. With this view he took a house not far from the castle, availing himself of every opportunity of throwing himself into the lady's way, and resolved at all risks, and whatever might be the labour,

to induce her to relinquish the unsociable conduct of which she was accused

After feasting his eyes long and vainly in her sight, he, at length, contrived to obtain the pleasure of an introduction, but she had scarcely spoken two words to him, when she excused herself and retreated as usual, home. In truth she had been short with him and he felt it in such a way, that he made a strong resolution which he almost as suddenly broke, of renouncing all thoughts of her for ever. He next enlisted some of her own sex, among her most intimate acquaintance, to employ their influence with her, to vanquish her obduracy, in order that, after having earned the outworks, he might take the castle of Moncalhero by storm. But the enemy was on the alert, and all his efforts proved abortive. He looked, he sighed, he wrote, he went to mass, he walked before and behind the castle, in the woods, by the river side, where he threatened to drown himself but the lady's heart was more impregnable than a rock, harder than everything except his own fate, for she deigned neither to smile upon, nor to write to him. What should the wretched lover do? He had already lost his appetite, his complexion and his rest, besides his heart, and really felt very unwell. Though physicians were not the persons to prescribe for such a case, they were nevertheless called in, and made him a great deal worse, for he was now rapidly advancing towards that bourne, from which neither lovers nor travellers return, and without other help, it became very evident that the poor young gentleman would soon give up the ghost.

While his life hung suspended in this languishing state, one of his friends and fellow-officers, a happy fellow from Spoleto, hearing of his condition, came posting to his succour, determined at least to be in time for his funeral, and see that all due military honours were paid to his loving spirit. When he arrived, Messer Filiberto had just strength enough to tell the story of his love and the cruel disdain of the lady, intending afterwards, as he assured his friend to think no more about it, but quietly to expire. His friend however, having really a regard for him, and believing he would grow wiser as he grew older, strongly dissuaded him from the latter alternative, observing that he ought to think about it that it was a point of honour, on which he ought to pique himself, and bring it, like a good comedy, to a happy conclusion. 'My poor Filiberto,' he continued, 'leave the affair to me, and be assured you shall speak to her as much

as you please." "That is all I wish," exclaimed the patient, with a little more animation, while a slight colour suffused his cheek; "persuade her only to listen to me, and, trust me, I can manage the rest myself. But it is all a deception. What can you do, when I have wasted all kinds of love-messages, gifts, oaths, and promises, in vain?" "Do you get well; that is all you have to do," returned our Spoletino, "and leave the rest to me." He spoke with so much confidence that the patient in a short time grew wonderfully better; and when the physician a few days afterwards stepped in, he gave himself infinite credit for the improvement which had taken place. Now the reader must know, that the wits of Spoleto are renowned all over Italy; they are the most loose-tongued rattlers, the most diligent petitioners for alms, in the name of St. Antony; the most audacious and sleight-of-hand gentry in the world. They have a very excellent gift of talking, and making something out of nothing; and no less of persuading people to be of their own opinion, almost against their will. Nearly the whole of that amusing generation, who are in the habit of getting through the world, by easing the rich and the simple of their superfluous cash, who dance upon two poles, dole out the grace of Saint Paul, charm the dancing serpents, or sing wicked songs in the public streets, will be found to trace their birth to Spoleto.

Messer Filiberto's friend was well qualified, therefore, as a relation of these itinerant wits, to assist a brother in distress; especially in such a dilemma as that in which our hero found himself. Considering him, at length, sufficiently convalescent, our Spoletino fixed upon a sort of travelling pedlar, to forward the designs he had formed for the relief of the unhappy lover. Bribing him to exchange dresses, he took possession, for a period, of his collection of wares, consisting of every article most tempting to a woman's eyes, either for ornament or for use. Thus armed, he set out in the direction of Donna Zilia's residence, announcing himself as the old travelling merchant, with a fresh supply of the choicest goods. These tidings reaching the ears of the lady, she sent to desire him to call at her house, which he directly entered with the utmost familiarity, as if by no means for the first time, and addressed her in the most courteous language he could command. Then opening his treasures, she entered upon a review of the whole assortment, displacing and undervaluing everything, while she purchased nothing. At length, fixing her eyes upon some

beautiful veils and ribbons, of which she fancied she was in want she inquired how much he expected for such very ordinary articles? "If you will sell them, good man, for what they are really worth, I will take no less than five-and thirty yards, but if you ask too much, I will not look at them, I will not have a single ell." "My lady," replied the false merchant, "do my veils indeed please you? They are at your service, and sav nothing as to the price, it is already paid. And not only these, but the whole of this excellent assortment is your own, if you will but deign to receive it." "No, no, not so," cried the lady, that would not be right, I thank you, good man, though I certainly should like to have them at as low a rate as I can. So ask what you please, and I will give what I please, and then we shall understand one another. you gain your livelihood in this way, and surely it would be cruel, however much I might wish it, to take them for nothing. So deal fairly with me, and I will give you what I think the goods are really worth." "But, your ladyship please you," replied the wary merchant, "I shall consider it no loss, but a favour, if you will condescend to receive them, under no conditions at all. And I am sure, if you possess as courteous a mind as your face betokens, you will accept these trifles, presented to you on the part of one, who would gladly lay down, not only his whole property, but his life at your feet." At these words the lady, 'blushing celestial rosy red,' eyed the merchant keenly for a moment, 'I am astonished to hear you talk thus and I insist upon knowing who you really are. There is some mystery in all this, and I am rather inclined to think you must have mistaken the person to whom you speak.' The merchant however, not in the least abashed, being a native of Spoleto acquainted her in the mildest and most flattering terms, with the long and passionate attachment entertained for her by poor Messer Filiberto, and the delicacy with which he had concealed it until the very last. Handsome, accomplished, rich, and powerful, he was prepared to lay all his extensive seignories at her feet, and account himself the most fortunate of mankind. In short, he pleaded so eloquently, and played his part so well that she at length, after a pretty long resistance, consented to see his friend. He then hastened back to Messer Filiberto, who overwhelmed him with the most rapturous thanks and lost no time in preparing to pay a visit to his beloved, who received him at the appointed hour in the drawing room of her own house. There was a single mardservant in her company,

who sat at work in a recess, so that she could scarcely overhear their discourse.

Bending lowly before her, Messer Filiberto expressed his deep sense of the honour she had conferred on him, and proceeded in impassioned terms to relate the origin and progress of his affection, his almost unexampled sufferings, and the sole hope which still rendered his life supportable to him. He further assured her, that his gratitude would be eternal; in proportion to the amount of the obligations under which she laid him. The sole reply which he received to his repeated and earnest protestations, was, that she was resolved to remain faithful to the memory of her departed consort, and devote herself to the education of her only son. She was, moreover, grateful for his good opinion, though she was sure he could not fail to meet with ladies far more beautiful and more worthy of his regard. Finding that all his efforts proved quite fruitless, and that it was impossible to make any impression, he threw himself once more at her feet, with tears in his eyes, declaring that, if she possessed the cruelty to deprive him of all hope, he should not long survive. The lady remained silent, and Messer Filiberto then summoning his utmost pride and fortitude to his aid, prepared to take his leave; beseeching her only in the common courtesy and hospitality of the country, to grant him in return for his long love and sufferings, a single kiss, which, against all social laws, she had before denied him; although it was generally yielded to all strangers who entered an hospitable roof. "I wish," replied Donna Zilia, "I knew whether your affection for me is so strong as you pretend, for then, if you will but take a vow to observe one thing, I will grant what you require. I shall then believe I am truly beloved, but never till then." The lover eagerly swore to observe the conditions she should impose, and seized the price of the promise he had given. "Now, Signor Filiberto," exclaimed the lady, "prepare to execute the cruel sentence I shall impose. It is my will and pleasure that you no longer trouble me with such entreaties for the future, at least for some time; and if you are a true knight, you will not again unseal your lips for the space of three years." The lover was greatly surprised and shocked, on hearing so harsh and unjust a sentence; though at the same time, he signified his submission by his silence, merely nodding his assent. Soon after, making the lady a low bow, he took his departure for his own residence. There, taking the affair into his most serious

consideration he at last came to the fixed resolution of submitting to this very severe penalty, as a punishment, at least, for his folly in so lightly sporting with his oath. Suddenly, then he became dumb and feigning that he had met with some accident he set out from Moncaliero on his return to Virle. His friends on finding him in this sad condition expressed the utmost sorrow and surprise but, as he retained his usual cheerfulness and sense enough to conduct his own affairs, they corresponded with him as well as if he had retained the nine parts of speech. Committing his affairs to the conduct of his steward a distant relation in whom he had the highest confidence he determined to set out on a tour for France, to beguile, if possible the irksomeness of his situation. Of an extremely handsome person and possessing noble and imposing manners, the misfortune under which he appeared to labour was doubly regretted wherever our hero made his appearance.

About the period of his arrival in France Charles the seventh of that name was engaged in a warm and sanguinary war against the English attempting to recover possession of the dominions which his predecessors had lost. Having already driven them from Gascony and other parts he was busily preparing to follow up his successes in Normandy. On arriving at this sovereign's court Messer Filiberto had the good fortune to find several of his friends among the barons and cavaliers in the king's service from whom he experienced a very kind reception which was rather enhanced by their knowledge of the cruel misfortune under which he laboured. But as it was not of such a nature as to incapacitate him for battle he made signs that he wished to enter into the king's bodyguards, and being a knight of well known prowess this resolution was much applauded no less by His Majesty than by all his friends. Having equipped himself in a suitable manner, he accompanied a division of the army intended to carry Rouen by assault. Here he performed such feats of strength and heroic valour in the presence of the king as to excite the greatest admiration, and on the third attack the place was carried by storm. His Majesty afterwards inquiring more particularly into the history of the valiant knight and learning that he was one of the lords of Virle in Piedmont, instantly conferred upon him an office in his royal household and presented him with a large sum of money as an encouragement to persevere in the noble career he had commenced observing at the same time that he trusted

some of his physicians would be enabled to remove the impediment in his speech. Our hero, smiling at this observation, expressed his gratitude for these royal favours as well as he could; shaking his fist at the same time, in token that he would punish His Majesty's adversaries. Soon after, a sharp skirmish occurred between the French and the enemy for the possession of a bridge. The affair becoming serious, and the trumpets sounding to arms, the king, in order to encourage his troops, galloped towards the spot: Talbot, the commander of the English forces, was already there, and had nearly obtained possession of the bridge. His Majesty was in the act of encouraging his soldiers, when Messer Filiberto, on his black charger, passed him at full speed with his company. With his lance in rest, he rode full at the horse of Talbot, which fell to the ground. Then seizing his huge club, and followed by his companions, he made such terrible havoc among the English, that, dealing death in every blow, he shortly dispersed them on all sides, and compelled them to abandon their position on the bridge. It was with difficulty that their commander himself effected his escape; while King Charles, following up his success, in a short time obtained possession of the whole of Normandy.

On this occasion the king returned public thanks to the heroic Filiberto, and in the presence of all the first nobility of his kingdom, invested him with the command of several castles, with a hundred men-at-arms to attend him. He now stood so high in favour at court, that the monarch spared no expense to obtain the first professional advice that could be found in every country, with the hope of restoring him to the use of speech; and, after holding a solemn tournament in honour of the French victories, he proclaimed a reward of ten thousand francs to be paid to any physician, or other person, who should be fortunate enough to discover the means of restoring the use of speech to a dumb cavalier, who had lost his voice in a single night. The fame of this reward reaching as far as Italy, many adventurers, induced by the hope of gain, sallied forth to try their skill, however vainly, since it was impossible to make him speak against his will. Incensed at observing such a concourse of people at his court, under the pretence of performing experiments on the dumb gentleman, until the whole capital became infested with quacks, His Majesty ordered a fresh proclamation to go forth, stating, that whoever undertook to effect the cure, should thenceforth, in case of failing to perform what he

promised be put to death, unless he paid down the sum of ten thousand francs. The good effect of this regulation was quickly perceived in the diminution of pretenders to infallible cures, few caring to risk their fortunes or their lives in case of their inability to pay, though they had before been so liberal of their reputation. When the tidings of Messer Filiberto's good fortune and favour at the French king's court reached Moncaliero, Donna Zilia, imagining that his continued silence must be solely owing to the vow he had taken, and the time being at length nearly expired, fancied it would be no very bad speculation to secure the ten thousand francs for herself. Not doubting but that his love remained still warm and constant, and that she really possessed the art of removing the dumbness at her pleasure, she resolved to lose no time in setting off directly for Paris, where she was introduced to the commissioners appointed to preside over Messer Filiberto's case. "I am come, my lords," she observed, "hearing that a gentleman of the court has for some time past lost his speech, to restore to him that invaluable faculty, possessing for that purpose some secret remedies, which I trust will prove efficacious. In the course of a fortnight he will probably be one of the most eloquent men at court, and I am quite willing to run the risk of the penalty, if I perform not my engagement as required. There must, however, be no witness to my proceedings, the patient must be entrusted entirely to me. I should not like every pretender to obtain a knowledge of the secret I possess, it is one which will require the utmost art in its application." Rejoiced to hear her speak with so much confidence on the subject, the commissioners immediately dispatched a message to Messer Filiberto, informing him that a lady had just arrived from Piedmont, boasting that she could perform what the most learned of the faculty in France had failed to do, by restoring the dumb to speech. The answer to this was an invitation to wait upon our hero at his own residence, when he recognized the cruel beauty who had imposed so severe a penance, and concluded at the same time that she had undertaken the journey not out of any affection for him, but with the most mercenary views. Reflecting on his long sufferings and unrequited affection, his love was suddenly converted into a strong desire of revenge; he therefore came to a determination of still playing the mute, and not deigning to exchange a single word with her, merely bowed to her politely at a distance. After some moments' silence, the

lady, finding that he had no inclination to speak, inquired in a gentle tone whether he was at a loss to discover in whose company he was? He gave her to understand that he knew her perfectly well, but that he had not yet recovered his speech, motioning, at the same time, with his fingers towards his mouth. On this she informed him that she now absolved him from his vow, that she had travelled to Paris for that purpose, and that he might talk as much as he pleased. But the dumb lover, only motioning his thanks, still continued as silent as before; until the lady, losing all patience, very freely expressed her disappointment and displeasure. Still it availed her nothing, and fearful of the consequences to herself, if he persisted in his unaccountable obstinacy, she had at length recourse to caresses and concessions, which, whatever advantage he chose to take of them, proved ultimately as fruitless to restore his eloquence, as every other means. The tears and prayers of the lady, to prevail upon him to speak, became now doubly clamorous; while she sorely repented her former cruelty and folly, which had brought her into the predicament of forfeiting either ten thousand francs or her life. She would immediately have been placed under a military guard, had it not been for the intercession of the dumb gentleman, who made signs that they should desist. The penalty, however, was to be enforced; but the lady, being of an excessively avaricious turn, resolved rather to die than to furnish the prescribed sum, and thus deprive her beloved boy of a portion of his inheritance. When reduced to this extremity, Messer Filiberto, believing that upon the whole he had sufficiently revenged himself, took compassion upon her sufferings, and hastened to obtain an audience of the king. He entreated as a special favour, that His Majesty would remit the fine, and grant liberty to her, as well as to some other debtors, which, in the utmost surprise at hearing the sound of his voice, the king promised to do. He then proceeded to inform His Majesty of the whole history of his attachment to the lady, and the strange results by which it had been attended to both parties though fortunately all had ended well. Messer Filiberto then hastened to hold an audience with the lady, seriously proposing to give her a little good advice; and she was quite as much rejoiced as His Majesty, when she first heard him speak. "You may recollect, madam," he observed, "that some time ago, when at Moncaliero, I expressed the most ardent and constant attachment to you; an attachment which

I did not then think that time could have ever diminished But your conduct in cheating me into the vow of silence, and your cruelty to me, as well before that time as since, have wrought a complete change in my sentiments towards you I have acquired wealth and honours, I stand high in the favour of my monarch, and having, I think, taken ample revenge upon you, by the fears and trouble you have experienced, I have not only granted you your liberty and your life, but ordered you to be freely supplied with every convenience and facility for your return home I need not advise you to conduct yourself in future with care and prudence, in all the economical virtues you are reputed to be unvalled, but I would venture to hint, that from the example I have in this instance afforded you, you will be more cautious how you sport with the feelings of those who love you, as it is an old saying, that the wily are often taken in their own nets " He then provided her with an honourable escort, and money to defray her expenses, while he himself, not long after, received the hand of a young beauty of the court bestowed upon him by his royal master By this union he received an accession of several castles and domains, and sent for his witty young friend from Spoleto, to share with him a portion of his prosperity Still retaining his favour at court, upon the death of Charles VII, he continued to enjoy the same appointments, and the same influence, under Louis XI, his successor

## BANDITTI

GIOVAMBATTISTA GIRALDI CINTHIO

AFTER the death of Leo the Tenth, the Holy See long remained vacant, owing to the want of unanimity of opinion among the cardinals, who were unwilling to advance to the papal dignity any one of those sitting in the conclave, such were their clashing interests. This division afterwards led to the promotion of Adriano, who had most probably never dreamed of such an honour during the whole course of his life.

During the interim there arose many serious tumults and disturbances in Rome, and more especially in the immediate vicinity, where the woods and roads were on all sides infested with banditti, so that no travellers could pass with safety from place to place. Although the government exercised the utmost vigilance in repressing these disorders, their authors still found an asylum in the caves and mountains, whence they only issued to fall like wild beasts upon their prey, and woeful was the fate of those who fell into their hands. It was during this period that Adriano arrived at Rome to assume the pontifical chair, and having arranged the internal affairs of the city, he attended to the complaints of the increasing disorders in the vicinity, resolving to take measures to extirpate the whole race of banditti out of his dominions. Summoning the head of the police to his presence, to him he committed the charge, as the most courageous and prudent officer he knew, of penetrating into the hidden retreats and fastnesses occupied by these ferocious men. After receiving his commission, the officer immediately provided himself with a select company, both of horse and foot, ready furnished with all kinds of arms and equipments, and attended by a vast number of the fiercest dogs, as if he had been about to make an expedition to clear the woods and mountains of the beasts of prey. On arriving pretty near their haunts, his first object was to draw a line of circumvallation around the strong places which he had ascertained to be the chief rendezvous of the banditti; and then gradually drawing

into a narrower circle, with strong nets so spread as to prevent escape, he advanced to the sound of horns and bugles, mingled with the shouts of men, and baying of the dogs, to rouse these human monsters from their lairs. The better to discover them, they now urged on the bloodhounds to the track, which soon obliged the robbers to show themselves, and assume an attitude of defence. The officer commenced a vigorous assault, and after a sharp contest, in which several were killed, the robbers, intimidated by superior numbers, and the shouts of men and the baying of dogs, took to flight, each attempting to save himself in the best way he could. Upon this a strange scene presented itself, for the dogs, encouraged by their flight, pursued them with the utmost fury, running by their side, and seizing them by the legs or throat, which compelled the men to wheel round, and engage them with their sabres. Whichever way they fled they still found themselves surrounded at all points by dogs, and nets, and swords, from which they vainly endeavoured to extricate themselves. In this manner they continued to be gradually enclosed within a still narrower space, and their whole number being thus brought together, they again resolved to make a desperate stand. Though they fought with the strength of despairing men, it was still of no avail, and having no further place of refuge, they were all either killed or taken upon the spot. The survivors were hanged upon the nearest trees without the least trial, or any investigation into their crimes while their bodies were left a prey to the wolves and vultures of the mountains.

Out of the whole number there were only about twenty who contrived to elude the vigilance of the wary and valiant officer and his men. These were some, who on hearing their first approach from a neighbouring wood, and alarmed by the sound of bugles and the clamour of the battle, concluding their comrades had fallen fled as far as possible from their accustomed haunts. They at length drew up at an inn several miles distant, with the intention of there awaiting tidings of the result, having previously arrayed themselves in the rich dresses which had formerly belonged to more honourable personages. To give a greater air of probability to their new characters, a few of them had remained in their usual attire, the better to personate servants, who were attending upon their masters. Their leader appeared as one of the servants, perfectly aware of the magnitude of the danger, and quite on the alert. The gentlemen

entered first, with a rolling and idle motion of their limbs, calling for rooms, and whatever the house could afford of the best; while their servants waited humbly at a distance.

In the meanwhile the officer, having dispatched his sanguinary business in the wood, gathered up his nets and the spoils of victory, proposing to proceed in the same manner, and enclose the adjacent thicket. In his progress, however, he encountered a shepherd, who informed him that he would only lose his labour, by repeating the same operation, as he had just met a party of the banditti, dressed like gentlemen, coming out of the wood, on their way to Naples. The officer, being resolved to ascertain the truth of this account, sent forward one of his spies to obtain information, following him at an easy pace. The man proceeded until he arrived at the very inn where the gentlemen had put up, and introducing himself as a stranger, he ordered dinner to be prepared. The gentlemen, however, wishing to be thought courteous, invited him to dine with them, and entering into conversation, when they found he was going on to Naples, inquired if he had lately heard anything new? "Nothing very new, signor," replied the stranger, "except that as I came out of Rome, I happened to meet the brave head of the police returning, and he told me that he had just made such complete havoc amongst the banditti, that he believed there was not one left alive." Overjoyed on hearing this, the villains began to think themselves quite secure; for the officer, they believed, had now returned home, supposing they had all fallen into his hands.

After dinner the stranger got up, saying that he must proceed to Naples; but returning instantly to his employer, he informed him that he had found the robbers enjoying themselves at the inn. In a very short space of time the brave officer was also there; but just as he was about to enter, the leader of the robbers, standing behind his pretended master's chair, near the window, observed the concourse of people at hand, among whom he marked also the identical stranger who had just left them. He was on the point of acquainting his companions, when he reflected, that all means of escape being cut off, he should only implicate himself in their fate in the tumult which would ensue. As a last effort to save himself, he therefore only observed to his master: "I tasted an excellent wine just now in the cellar, and I think, signor, it would suit your taste: I will step and see that the host plays you fair about it"; saying which, and carrying a huge dish before him, he somewhat promptly left

the apartment. As he went downstairs he met the officer and his myrmidons coming up, who supposing him to be one of the servants of the house, inquired in what manner the strange gentlemen above were then employed. They are still at table, he answered in a pert tone, and I am just going to bring them some more wine. Well go you rogue, returned the other, and we will drink it. As you please for that, gentlemen answered the waiter, and hastened as quickly as possible into the vault, thence exploring his way out by a secret passage until he found himself in a place of safety.

The officer had by this time seized and secured the party of gentlemen at table, and taking possession of their seats, ordered a fresh dinner, every moment expecting the excellent wine which the rogue of a waiter had promised to bring. At length turning to the host, he desired to know what that waiter of his, whom they had met on the stairs, was so very long about?

No waiter of mine is gone for wine, signor, he belonged to the party of gentlemen whom you have just seized. Ah, can that be true? cried the officer. It is, it is, cried the whole band, as if displeased that he was not to share the same fate.

He was our servant, that is, he was our captain, we mean. In that disguise he has imposed upon you and upon us. For seeing you at hand, as we have reason to believe, he pretended to go for wine, and left us without saying a word, to fall into your hands, escaping from the fate which he saw prepared for his companions, and thus showing himself as prudent as we have been vain and foolish.

Enraged at the idea of having been thus outwitted by the chief of the gang, whom he was in particular desirous of securing, the officer everywhere sought to discover his retreat, but in vain. He was at length compelled to return with his other prisoners to Rome, where the unfortunate gentlemen immediately shared the fate of their companions.

The sole survivor of the gang, who by his coolness and penetration had saved himself, succeeded in secretly leaving the papal dominions, and retired beyond the jurisdiction of the Church into the Florentine territories. He had there time to repent, and abandoning the wicked career upon which he had first entered, he became a very honest citizen, and an example of sobriety, industry, and charity to all his neighbours.

## GHOSTS

ANTON-FRANCESCO GRAZZINI

THERE was formerly an honest citizen of Florence, known by the name of Guasparri del Calandra, by trade a goldbeater, and a pretty skilful master of his art. He was excessively good-natured, but withal of so thick and heavy an intellect, that he owed his good fortune chiefly to his marriage with a lady who had succeeded to two pleasant farms in the Prato, and two houses in Florence. On this event he shut up his shop, resolving to lead a life of leisure in the country, with only one son, a boy about five years old, and his lady, who promised no further addition to his family. While residing at his villa, he entered into social terms with a gentleman of the name of Scheggia, and through him, with his friends Pilucca, Monaco, and Zoroastro. Delighted with their wit and spirit, for they were all boon companions of the first order, he frequently invited them, or went to sup with them at the residence of Pilucca, in Via Scala, surrounded with pleasant gardens, where during summer they were wont to sup in the open air, under the viny shade. Here Guasparri, having always piqued himself on his delicate knowledge of various wines, as well as on furnishing a sumptuous assortment of them upon occasion, was elected by the joint consent of his companions master of the feast. This he conceived a high honour, and to express his sense of its great dignity and importance, he insisted upon providing and laying in every fresh stock, most assiduously inspecting, for that purpose, the stores of the liquor merchants, and the first taverns in the city. But while he allowed no wine to be drunk by them but his own, he agreed that they should provide the eatables in equal shares. Of these, the said Scheggia was the caterer, an office which he discharged to the admiration of all his friends, whose powers of deglutition did ample justice to the taste both of Scheggia and his friend. The latter they frequently crowned with vine and ivy, in imitation of the Bacchanalian god, while Zoroastro in his devotion declared, that neither men nor gods

had ever discovered the vaneties of flavour like his friend Guasparri. All this was extremely agreeable to our hero, who began, for the first time in his life, to conceive himself of some importance, leading the toasts, as well as the conversation, to the most trifling and whimsical topics that could be imagined. The doctrine of witchcraft, incantations, and apparitions, and stories of dead people who had come to life again, were here discussed the whole night through, to the great edification of the host. But towards midnight Guasparri, though he affected to ridicule the idea of supernatural appearances, began to feel extremely uncomfortable on hearing the awful particulars of each story, and in vain tried to laugh it off, by saying that the dead found quite enough to do to get a living in their own world, without coming back again to trouble us in this. His sly companions, however, had the wit to see through the mark, and were infinitely amused at witnessing his exertions to shake off the fears which too evidently oppressed him. Pilucca's gardens continuing still the scene of their summer amusements, and Guasparri still superintending the wine, it happened that one of the relations of the latter, as if envious of the good fellowship he did not enjoy, began to blame his folly and extravagance in supplying the whole party with wine, while his pretended friends only flattered him to his face, to turn him into a subject of ridicule for all Florence when they fest him, and that, in short, he would soon become quite notorious to the whole city for a simpleton as he was. Believing, as usual, everything that was told him, Guasparri resolved to withdraw from their company, and directly set off home, where he had left his wife, and son, and a single maidservant, to take care of themselves.

His old friends, waiting dinner for him a long while, began to wonder whither he could have withdrawn himself, and after in vain searching all the likely and all the unlikely places they could think of, they accidentally heard, just as their best wines were getting low, that he was actually gone to live with his family at the villa, a place where, of all others, they least thought of looking for him. They began to be seriously afraid that there was now an end to their usual course of festivity, but our hero in a short time becoming weary of the villa, resolved to return to town, where Pilucca one day accidentally met him walking along the streets of Florence. Joyhilly hailing, and shaking him by the hand, Pilucca welcomed him back, observing, as he invited him for the same evening to a feast. 'Heavens,

how truly rejoiced I am to see you here once more! Where can you have been? I have not had the flavour of good wine in my mouth, nor heard the stave of a good song, since you left us." Guasparri, drawing back, replied that he was sorry he could not come; but on being questioned more narrowly, unable to give any excuse, and longing at the same time to be admitted to their company, he fairly confessed that there was no resisting such an offer—he would come; but that he could not pretend any longer to dictate to them what wines they ought to drink. Then relating the conversation he had had with his cousin, he declared he had come to the resolution of furnishing no more. His companion, on hearing this, affected to laugh outright, though he really felt little inclination, when he considered the difference it would make, were each of them to furnish his proportion, instead of laying the whole expense of the bottles upon their friend. At the same time, he flattered himself he should soon be able to bring him round to his usual habits. When the party assembled in the evening, Piuca communicated what had passed between him and Guasparri, to the great dismay of his companions, and they then held a regular council as to how they should proceed. They resolved to receive him with cheerful and happy looks, and soon succeeded so well in flattering him into good humour, that they obtained his company for several successive nights; but finding that they could never bring him to the same liberal way of thinking as formerly, they at length, after repeated trials, came to the resolution of fairly casting him off, declaring that he was no longer worthy of keeping company with gentlemen like themselves.

They deliberated, therefore, on the best method of getting rid of him, by playing him some humorous trick, and fleecing him of his money at the same time in such a way as to give him no sort of inclination to return. Calculating upon the fears which they suspected he entertained for goblins, especially of such as haunted the churchyards, they proceeded to deliberate in what way they might turn them to good account. The ghostly council accordingly met; and aware that our hero, when visiting certain friends, had to return home in the evening over the bridge of Carraja, in order to reach his own house, situated in Borgo Stella, and that no one slept in the same house, his family being at the villa, they forthwith commenced their operations. There was a certain Signor Meino, a manufacturer, and a great friend of Scheggia's, who resided next door to our

hero, and great facility of communication existed between the houses. With some persuasion, Scheggia won over his friend to enter into their designs, and the day being arrived when they were to try the strength of Guasparri's vain boasting and resolution against spirits, they had everything prepared before evening for the execution of their plot. They were all supping together and turning the conversation to the proper topic, they dwelt so long and fearfully upon the theory of apparitions, that our friend Guasparri's hair began to bristle up, and he reflected with dread upon the solitary walk he had before him, ere he reached his beloved home. He would fain have requested one of them to accompany him at least as far as the bridge, had he not already committed his valour so deeply in the vain boastings he had so long been in the habit of indulging upon the subject. At one time he came to the resolution of staying and sleeping where he was but when he began to advance excuses for this purpose Zoroastro who saw into his design, completely foiled him by instantly proposing cards, at which our hero had already lost such immense sums that he started as if he had really seen a ghost. Declaring that he must instantly keep an appointment he set out followed quietly at a distance by his wily companions and took the road by Santa Maria Novella, until he reached the fosse which led straight to the bridge of Carraja. Scheggia now quickened his pace, and running through the Borgo Ognissanti arrived at the bridge before Guasparri, by this shorter cut and quickly marshalled his companions, he himself lying hid in the little church of Santo Antonio, on the verge of the Arno adjoining Santa Trinità.

It happened to be a dark night in September, and agreeably to the orders of Zoroastro and Scheggia, their companions were stationed near the first pillars, each of whom held a long pike in his hand to which were attached several large white sheets, with a cross upon the summit to resemble arms, and a huge mask of a most diabolical aspect. Two lanterns all on fire served for the eyes, while the mouth grinned with a horrible smile flaming with another lantern which showed off the long sharp teeth to advantage. A long flat nose, sharp chin, and an immense slouch hat completed the terrific figure, a sight of which would have been almost sufficient to put to flight the most doughty heroes of romance, not excepting the mad Orlando himself. Such was the ambuscade that lay glaring in secret, awaiting the arrival of the unfortunate Guasparri. They were

all to rise up at the same moment, just as he passed these horrid apparitions, addressing each other by the name of Cuccobèoni, in order more effectually to alarm their hapless victim with their voices, who at length cautiously approached the bridge, using his utmost efforts at the same time to banish the idea of spectres from his mind. A low whistle from Scheggia was now the signal for the apparitions to appear, when they gradually rose from the earth, spreading larger and larger till they assumed their full terrific dimensions. Guasparri had just got half over the bridge; some of the apparitions stood before and some behind him; and his little strength and courage failing him together, he turned round each way, but had no power left to escape on either hand. The next moment the whole Arno seemed to teem with spectres, as tall in our poor hero's opinion as the church steeples, and exceeding the number, as he afterwards asserted, of thirty thousand demons, whose diabolical features now riveted him to the spot. "The Lord help me! the Lord help me!" he exclaimed in a doleful voice, but had no power to move. Soon observing that they were approaching as if to gather round him, and believing that he should be instantly devoured, he cried out in a still louder voice: "The Lord help me to pray! the Lord help me to run! I will run in the name of the Lord!" And away he wildly rushed through the midst of the apparitions, never once staying to breathe, or to look behind him, until he arrived at the house of Pilucca, where he knocked with such violence, as nearly to burst open the door. Here his friends were many of them assembled to welcome him back, having understood from their companions on the bridge, that they might expect him in a short time, and that they must do all in their power to restore his suspended faculties. He threw himself upon a couch, unable for some time to recover breath; he could not utter a word, and he appeared on the point of swooning away, when they applied the necessary restoratives.

The moment Guasparri had disappeared, Scheggia dispatched his companions to Meino's house, in order to secure the fruits of their adventure, in the manner we shall soon recount; while he himself hastened to Pilucca's, where he found his friend Guasparri so far recovered, as to be giving the most strange and unintelligible description of the wonderful and appalling scenes through which he had passed. His audience, by affecting to discredit the truth of the relation, threw him into the utmost rage, when Scheggia, walking quietly into the room from an

inner chamber, as if he had remained there the whole of the evening, persuaded our hero to begin his story anew. Still he could not be persuaded, in spite of Guasparri's swearing that such was the fact, that the apparitions had literally appeared to him, and the latter was thrown into the greatest despair, when Scheggia, persisting in his unbelief, declared that he only meant to make fools of them all, and challenged Guasparri at the same time to accompany him to the bridge. Declining this offer, however, Guasparri contented himself with pointing out the exact situation in which the spirits attacked him when both banks of the Arno were covered with their troops, clothed in white uniform, with faces of fire, and heads as black as Erebus all rushing on him at once to make him their prisoner. But when his friends pretended to return from a visit to the bridge, without discovering any remains of the apparitions, they all with one consent began to upbraid him for his folly and cowardice, declaring that he must have drunk his senses away, and that he must be delirious to think of coming to interrupt them over their cards, with such tales as these. They then sat down again quietly to play, while Guasparri was revolving in his mind how he could contrive to obtain the escort of the nightly watch as far as his own house. The moment he heard them passing the moon having now risen, he sallied forth, and offered them a handsome reward if they would see him safe over the bridge. As they approached it, he seized the officer more closely by the arm, shutting his eyes, to avoid the sight of the same distracting objects as he passed along.

On reaching his house, he felt some qualms of fear at the idea of sleeping there alone, his family residing at the villa, and he would gladly have gone farther, to the house of one of his relations had not the night been so very far advanced. It was his custom during that season to go to rest in a room upon the ground floor, which Meino, his neighbour, had been prevailed upon by Scheggia to hang entirely with black drapery, borrowed from the Osso company, adorned with emblems adapted to sacred occasions, such as death's heads, crosses, and remnants of mortality of every description. Round the room were placed many large wax candles, such as are used at burials casting a fearful and glaring light, while in the midst of all was placed a bier covered with a carpet, on which lay the resemblance of a corpse, with orange flowers and rosemary strewed all round. A crucifix was fixed over the head, and two wax lights at each

side, for the convenience of those who might wish to contemplate the features more narrowly. Guasparri proceeded to take possession as usual of his own apartment, and as he opened the door beheld a scene which might have startled a stouter philosopher than himself. With his eyes fixed upon the whole apparatus of mortality, he stood fascinated to the spot, and when he attempted to retreat, he could proceed no farther than the door, where he fell, overpowered with horror, once more upon his knees, his head turned slightly back to ascertain whether the dead man were following to show him out. But though he could not speak, he uttered an inward prayer, which at length endued him with so much strength as to enable him to rise up from his knees, and with another effort of despair, he got through the door, and locking it eagerly after him to prevent pursuit, rushed out of the house. He then once more took to flight, with the intention of again seeking the residence of the very enemies who had thus cruelly invaded his repose. And as the greater fear is always apt to remove the impression of a slighter, our hero in this his extremity, no longer regarding the apparitions on the bridge, which had lately inspired him with so much awe, pressed valiantly forward until he reached the very house he had not long since left. Here was a fresh scene of pleasure for his malicious companions, who for a long time permitted him to knock in vain. At length Pilucca made his appearance, exclaiming in an angry tone: "What, are you here again? Will you never leave off these mad tricks of yours? What do you mean by this conduct?" "Oh, help, help! have mercy on me, good gentlemen," was our hero's reply. "My house is full of spirits; and I think all the demons in Tartarus must this night have broken loose. Oh, such a night!" and he immediately proceeded with a fresh account of his adventures. Such was the violence of his gesticulations and his perturbations, that his wicked friends at length consented, yielding to his vehement entreaties, to accompany him home, where he vowed he would fully satisfy them in regard to the truth of his statements. In the meantime, however, another party had been busily employed in removing the fearful preparations, which had so much disturbed the equanimity of our hero's soul; and before he returned home with his fresh escort, the whole house had resumed its usual state, while the wary authors of the change had already taken refuge in the dwelling of Meino. "Why do you tremble so?" cried Zoroastro, as our poor friend

laid his hand upon his own door, and then drew back, "really, if you had not played us this trick once before to-night, we should almost be inclined to believe you, but you are not the man to impose upon us as you think." To this, Guasparri, bidding him enter before him, replied, that he would forfeit his eyes if he had spoken a single word more than the truth, which they would find to their cost when they ventured in. "Neither your eyes nor your head will be of any use to us," returned Zoroastro "but if you are serious, pledge us this diamond ring upon it and two dozen bottles of your Monte Pulciano to encourage us. The truth is, we do not believe that you have seen anything either here or at the bridge, but pledge us the wine and keep your head upon your own shoulders, and we will encounter the ghosts." To this the poor wretch consented feeling assured that they would find a pretty warm reception from the visible and invisible spirits which swarmed about the room. So he put the diamond ring into their hands, worth at least thirty gold ducats, at the same time challenging each of the party to advance. Scheggia at first drew back, as if afraid, saying "Suppose your house should have been robbed in your absence. Do you go first," he continued, addressing Pilucca.

"No do you do you," cried each in their turn, which threw Guasparri into greater consternation than ever. "It is so very dark," added Monaco, "I dread going in the dark into a place where there may be thieves." "Well, here is a lantern," rejoined another "take it, and forward, in the name of Heaven." So Monaco pretended to be obliged to advance, and the others followed Guasparri bringing up the rear with evident fears of the event. When he laid his hand on the door of the haunted chamber Monaco paused, on which a thrill ran through our hero's frame and his hair began to bristle up. Seeing Zoroastro about to press forward, he held him back by the skirt of the coat whispering "It is not safe, let us go back", when suddenly opening the room door, and pushing him forwards, they burst into a loud laugh, declaring that the wager was won. Every thing stood in its usual place, to the no small surprise and confusion of our hero, who cast his eyes in every direction, in search of the demons, the sulphur tapers, the death's heads, and the dead man, but everything had disappeared. "Oh, thou villain, thou impostor!" they all cried out, "we never suspected, Guasparri, that you could have used us thus. One would have thought from your looks, you were leading us into

the infernal pit; everything here is just as it was; it is really too bad; and yet you pretend to be shocked and surprised. We shall be compelled to decline your acquaintance: this is carrying matters quite too far."

It is impossible to do justice to our hero during this scene; he knew not whether he was really awake or in a dream; he raved and he rolled his eyes, but took not the least notice of what they said. To restore him a little to his wits, his friends began to entreat him, that as he had succeeded so well in his scheme of imposing upon them, and rousing them from their beds, he would at least not think of carrying the affair farther, and exposing them to the laughter of the whole city on the ensuing day. "We have secured the ring and the wine, however; that part of the joke is ours, so we are content: and if you please," continued Scheggia, observing that our hero remained far from easy in his mind, "if you please, I will stay with you here all night." Though he gratefully accepted his friend's offer, he never closed his eyes during that night, dwelling on the scenes which had so strongly impressed themselves upon his imagination. The next morning he rose early, and set out to join his family at the villa, desirous of trying what a change of scene would effect in removing the unpleasant associations of the previous night. He had nearly, however, fallen a victim to this unfeeling and injudicious prank on the part of his old friends; for on the third day he was in so violent a fever that the physicians almost despaired of his life. They might be said to have flayed him alive, for during his convalescence he really cast away his old skin; nor was it only in this respect that he underwent a change: he no longer left his family, and a blessed regeneration was the consequence of the frolic of his false friends.

On their side, the ensuing day was a day of triumph and festivity; they laughed and feasted at the expense of their unfortunate companion; but such triumphs and such follies usually end in bitterness and tears; the fate of their authors being still more pitiable than that of the victims they pursue. They even attempted to get the credulous Guasparri into their snares, and to betray him once more, in which they would most likely have succeeded, had it not been for the kind relation who interfered in his favour on a former occasion, and who now persuaded him to dispose of his house in town, and to attach himself to rural pursuits.

## A GOLDEN SHOWER

CELIO MALESPINI

At the time when the Marquess of Pescara was governor in the Milanese there lived two gentlemen, of the respective names of Raffaello Chiecaro and Antonio Capputo, who had obtained from the senate the use of some public stoves, which, merely paying a small annual tax, made them very large returns consuming only half the usual proportion of fuel. Now, near the piazza of San Stefano resided a certain retainer to the court of King Philip a man of a free and liberal turn of mind very generally esteemed by his acquaintance. How he first became intimate with Signor Chiecaro, I am at a loss to state but certain it is that he was frequently seen beguiling his hours at the house of that wily Genoese. The latter, desirous one day of trying how far he could play upon the courtier's credulity observed to him. Do you see this sonnet, my dear signor? if you please I will teach you a very curious art. Read it it is Petrarch's and begins you see

*Rotta è l'alta colonna e l'verde Lauro etc*

Now strange as you may think it, I will show you a different sonnet under this beginning

*Aimè il bel viso aimè il soave sguardo*

Nay I defy you that is impossible cried his friend or, if it be possible pray let me learn quickly how it may be done. With an air of importance the Genoese put his hand into his pocket and took out a small flagon into which he dipped a bit of cotton and touched the letters of the first sonnet which quickly made way for those of the second. To the eyes of his companion the whole of this appeared little less than a miracle he declared in his excessive admiration that it was a secret worthy the possession of the greatest princes in the world. Yet it is yours for all that replied the Genoese and when you wish

to write what is not meant for every eye, you have only to dissolve so much Roman vitriol in a drop of fresh water, and take a virgin quill, never yet contaminated with ink, and write what you please. The moment it is dry, the writing will disappear; and having brought this to perfection, you will next prepare the following kind of ink: Take a handful of wheat straw, set it on fire, but look well to your house, by clapping a large extinguisher upon it before it be well burnt out. The residue will be a fine charcoal, which you will please to boil in the specified quantity of white wine, which will give you the ink required, to write upon any other subject in the same letter, that you may think proper, the former inscription lying concealed. When you wish this last to appear, take some Istrian galls, pounded in *aqua vite*, and having thus extracted their virtue, dip into it a piece of cotton, pass it lightly over the page, and the letter you want will appear." Here the Genoese ceased, and so delighted was the silly courtier with the secret, that he would willingly have bestowed upon him any reward he had asked. But the time was not yet come, and having received it gratuitously, our hero could only evince his warm gratitude for the gift. Having gone thus far, Signor Chiecaro, elated at his success, touched upon a variety of other topics; among which, after inviting his friend to take the fresh air in his garden, he put the following question: "Pray, my dear signor, have you any room in your house with a close furnace that would retain the heat?" "Indeed I have," said the other, "and I will convince you of it directly." So introducing our Genoese into the place, who expressed himself perfectly satisfied with it, the latter again inquired: "Have you such a thing as a small cauldron in the house?" "Yes, I have," was the reply. "Well, let it be broken then into pieces of about four fingers' breadth, and let them be well heated over a huge charcoal fire. You will then cool them as I shall point out to you. Take half a flask of strong vinegar, throw into it a good handful of salt, and as much pulverized tartar, and then suddenly quench the fiery metal in it by a speedy, deep, and satisfactory immersion. Repeat this five or six times over, by which the plates will be fully prepared for the ensuing process; the contrast between heat and cold being everything upon which we have to depend. These experiments will find you sufficient employment until the morrow, when I will return, and acquaint you with the grand processes I have in view; only let the whole be

conducted with the utmost secrecy, and no one touch the key of the apartment but yourself "

Flattering himself with the possession of some yet more valuable secrets, our simple hero promised to obey him in every thing, and, accordingly, the next morning exhibited the result of his labours to his view. Commending him very highly, the wily Genoese now said "Truly, I believe, you will never be at a loss how to proceed " "I believe so too," said our conceited gentleman, to the no small amusement of the other, "for you see what I have done " "Next then," added his friend, "you must cut up the metal into small bits, weigh out of it three ounces, and melt it down in a crucible until it becomes liquid. Into this throw leaf by leaf, the herb which I now give you", taking about fifty plantain stalks out of his handkerchief.

Do you know what it is? " "Oh, yes, there is plenty of it growing in my meadow just by," said our hero. "You are a fortunate man, then," rejoined his friend. "You must throw it into the melted copper, and leave it to cool in the crucible, watching it frequently, till I come again " "I will take care to do so," said our hero, and proceeded forthwith to business. His next object was to gather as much of the plantain root as he could possibly find, to give the proper tinge, as he was told, to the metal, and he proceeded to weigh out, and note down the various proportions with a piece of charcoal upon the wall. Being quite ignorant, however, of the process of fusing, of the proper degree of heat, and the best mode of confining it in the crucible, he placed it on a large heap of charcoal, and set to work with a little pair of bellows, about as powerful as a lady's fan, to blow it into a flame. When he thought it began to melt, he opened the crucible, and exposing it to the air, the metal became as hard and cold as before. Repeating the same experiment until he was quite weary, and half roasted alive before the fire, to his infinite delight he saw it begin to melt, and threw in the plantain leaves as directed. Then, no longer able to stand, and covered with dust and smoke, he lay down in a profuse perspiration, awaiting the arrival of his arch-deceiver, who approved of everything he had done, and next advised him to go and consult some chemists as to the value of his products, and learn how much they would give him the ounce. Believing he should soon penetrate into some greater secrets, faint and weary as he was, our hero hastily seized his cloak and sword, and ran as fast as his strength permitted to

the shop of a certain M. Ercole, an assayer, and found him just as he was going to supper. Earnestly entreating him to put it to the test upon the spot, though the assayer begged hard for a little time, he was at length prevailed upon to try a small piece of the new metal over the fire, to which he added a few bits of lead. Soon after, he declared, on examining the crucible, that he had detected several grains of gold, and that he was prepared to offer him two crowns and a half per ounce for such a product. Being well aware he had not made use of any gold, our experimentalist upon this observed: "But you are very much deceived, friend Ercole, in supposing there is any gold in the case; I did not put a single fraction of a grain in it." "Surely," said the assayer, "you will allow me to believe my own eyes; here is the gold, and you are one of the most fortunate men in the world, if you really did not put any gold in it." Hearing these words, the poor gentleman was overpowered with joy, and beseeching him to make a fresh trial, which succeeded equally well with the former, he assured his friend, the assayer, that he should be glad to let him have the whole of the metal on the terms he had mentioned. The assayer was extremely anxious to learn the exact process he had observed in fusing it, which our hero, however, with an air of infinite importance, tried to evade, and at length flatly refused to make him acquainted with the secret. Then, promising to bring fresh samples very soon, he retired and went to rest, though quite unable to close his eyes on account of the multitude of castles in the air that ceased not to haunt his imagination. His next meeting with his friend the Genoese was a very joyous one. He informed him, with tears of gratitude, of the grand test, and the complete success of his experiments. "Then I am now satisfied," returned the Genoese, "for I perceive you are quite equal to conduct the whole process without my further assistance. Indeed, your facility and skill are truly astonishing; and if you still indulge the least doubt of your own ability, pray mention it!" "Nay," replied his friend, "I have none; I think I stand in need of no further directions: and I have only to express my gratitude for the ample instructions you have already given me. Only acquaint me in what manner I can at all requite you, for I assure you, I shall think nothing too great for the noble secrets you have confided in me." "Say no more," said the Genoese, "I have only to entreat that you will value the secret for my sake, and unfold it to no one."

Unable to make any adequate return to this kind and courteous language our hero could only press his friend's hand in silence, who embracing him tenderly, took his departure. Thus fancying himself in full possession of unlimited wealth he began to calculate the different sums which he intended to bestow upon his friends and relatives, saying to himself as he proceeded 'Yes I will purchase the castle for Pietro, my good Paolo shall have an estate now but Giovanni must have the marquisate. Thanks great thanks to the Almighty, I shall at length have a little money in my pocket, in addition to His Majesty's pension, which I can throw about on all sides as I please. My sole fear is that the money market will not be able to supply me fast enough for my precious metal, though I dispose of it in all parts of the world.' Then after revolving the subject deeply in his mind he resolved to form a complete establishment for the manufacture of the precious article, hiring a number of artificers to assist him in the business and to collect a quantity of plantain roots wherever they were known to grow. These he stored up by fifty and a hundred loads at a time, until he had completely ransacked the country for many miles round. He employed all the boys and women he could find whom he supplied with baskets to bring the plantains to his house in such quantities as to excite the curiosity and wonder of all the neighbourhood.

Inquisitive to learn the nature of such proceedings, his wife frequently applied to him for an explanation but always in vain being told to attend to her household affairs, as he was fully competent to manage his own. When he had made his final preparations his friend the Genoese one day came to him with a countenance full of anxiety, and accosted him thus.

I wish from my very soul I had never undertaken this speculation from the senate, with all its pretended privileges a curse upon all such furnaces I am heartily sick of the job.

My dear Raffaello cried our hero, what is it that has thus disturbed you? What is it? replied the wily Genoese.

Why it is this I wish to go and leave this business with which our senate has saddled me (and yet I am compelled to keep to my engagement) and to set out immediately for Genoa. Now I am come to beg you will please to lend me an hundred ducats until my return which I shall take as a particular favour.

Oh certainly said our hero, and immediately went out and returned with a bag of gold, saying Help yourself, my dear

friend, and take as many as you please; for I owe you more, far more than anything I can repay. Indeed, I wish you would deign to put my gratitude to a severer test; I have friends who will join me in assisting you to a much larger amount." "I thank you," said the Genoese, "I will only take this sum at present; it is quite sufficient for the object I have in view." Then quietly pocketing the money, he took his departure, leaving our poor hero to carry on his operations alone. He had already expended more than a thousand crowns in the purchase of some buildings from Angelo Coiro, near Monte Brinza, admirably situated, as he imagined, for the purpose of carrying on his extensive business. Hither were conveyed the materials of his new trade, loads of charcoal and plantain, with crucibles, brass cauldrons, and silver plate; believing he was the first man who could boast of having set up a grand manufactory of gold. And here, shutting himself up, he superintended his enormous furnace, stripping himself to the skin, in order the better to heat his crucibles, and blowing with all his might to produce the fusion of his metals. Great was the fire, and great his toil and torture, though not equal to his desire of beholding the gold. Three hours incessantly he blew and blew, trying different kinds of processes, and different-sized vessels, without the least effect. The strong heat and the working of the bellows together, began at length to prove quite too much for his strength, while he stood in a violent perspiration from head to foot, without being any nearer the accomplishment of his task. The rest of his fires were in the same predicament, not the least fusion of the metals appearing, and the whole of his establishment, servants and assistants, were as weary and exhausted as himself. Eight hours had now elapsed, when the place becoming heated like one immense stove, and our poor hero having twice fainted away, he was borne home by his people, who refused any longer to bear the brunt of the day. His wife, who had observed a remarkable change in him of late, an unaccountable elevation and inequality of spirits, wild at times, and at times depressed, conceived no time was to be lost. Seeing him then brought home in the condition we have described, his face fiery, and his clothes covered with foam and dust, crying out at the same time loudly for drink, she compassionately ran towards him, and accosted him thus: "What can be the reason, my dear, of your strange conduct, shutting yourself up day and night in a place too hot for a salamander? Would to heaven

that that old wretch of a Genoese had broken his neck before you saw him! would that the great demon had caught him in his clutches! would that you had not been such a fool, my dear, as to have listened to him!" Hearing himself thus tenderly apostrophized by his wife, who presumed to intermeddle in things that he thought did not concern her, the poor man, impelled by rage and disappointment, lent her two hearty cuffs on the side of her head, which somewhat checked the flow of her tenderness. Then out of mere spite, instead of going to repose as he ought to have done, he got up, and ran to his friend the assayer's, to put his folly to a further test, with the same unhappy result as before. His final hopes now rested upon the return of the arch villain Chiccareo to put him into the right way again, but after bearing the sickness of hope deferred with great fortitude, during many weeks, he bethought him of following the Genoese, though he had no directions how to find him. First however, he essayed the effect of sending letters and special messengers in all directions without hearing the least tidings of him. His own personal exertions proved equally fruitless and in this state of affairs, lost in a world of chimeras, he passed his unhappy time till Christmas. About that time, happening one day to be in company, he heard a party of gentlemen conversing one of whom observed 'If you can do this you will render me a great service, for a certain speculation, by which I hoped to become richer than the Grand Turk has ended in smoke. An old villain of a Genoese, whom God confound has emptied my pockets of all my ready cash, though he seemed to come like Jupiter, in a golden shower.' "And how, replied his friend, did he inveigle you? What was the trick? What was the trick, indeed? you shall hear! He wanted to teach me how to make gold, and I, like a simple one who loves simplicity, wished to learn. For this purpose I advanced three hundred gold crowns, deposited in the hands of Luca Contile. 'Did you speak of gold crowns?' cried our hero no longer able to repress his curiosity, 'and of a Genoese? for pity's sake dear captain, go on.' This the captain did, and mutual explanations and condolences then took place. The only fact which they could clearly ascertain, was, that he had succeeded in the same manner in cheating them all, that he was gone and no longer to be found. After conversing for some time together upon the subject and considering in what way the losses they had suffered might best be repaired, they

arrived at the conclusion, that the most effectual plan would be, to avail themselves of the same means as had been practised by the Genoese, whenever they had the good fortune to meet with any friend as simple as they had themselves been. Somewhat consoled with having hit upon this ingenious method of reimbursing themselves, they laughed heartily, and took leave.

## A NEW LIFE

DOMENICO MARIA MANNI

THERE IS NO longer reason to doubt the truth of some very singular circumstances that are said to have occurred between two lovers Ginevra degli Amieri, and Antonio Rondinelli, and particularly when we reflect how generally they have been credited during upwards of three ages. They are as follows.

Antonio had become deeply enamoured of the beauties of the Lady Ginevra and had persevered in his attachment for more than four years subsequent to 1396 against the express wishes of her father, who wished to bestow her hand upon one of the Agolanti family named Francesco as being of superior fortune to his rival although not so agreeable in the eyes of the fair Ginevra. She may be said, therefore, to have been forced into the arms of Francesco, as she yielded a reluctant consent to her parents will, while unfortunately the passion of Antonio seemed only to acquire fresh vigour from the bitter disappointment of all his hopes. In the wretchedness of his heart he vowed never to bestow his hand upon another, and he still indulged himself in the sad consolation of gazing upon her at all public festivals in churches, and private assemblies.

Now it chanced that in the great plague of 1400, which ravaged so many cities of Italy, and especially Florence, the fair Ginevra was taken sick and owing either to the neglect of the physicians or the malignant nature of the disease soon after fell an apparent victim to its rage. Strong hysterical affections then little understood, had preceded her decease, and every one around her supposed that she had ceased to breathe. Immediate interment also taking place, as was usual in those periods of distress she narrowly escaped the fate most probably shared by many in such seasons of terror, of being inhumed alive. Borne by a body of priests, she was laid with little ceremony in the family vault, belonging to the chapel of her ancestors and to this day the place is pointed out to the curious stranger who visits the spot. She was greatly lamented

by her husband, her friends, and indeed by all who knew her virtues; but the grief of none was equal to that of Antonio Rondinelli, when he heard of her sudden decease.

Esteemed by all ranks, only a few months a bride, her supposed fate drew tears from many eyes; yet only a few hours of that fatal night had elapsed, when awaking out of her lethargic slumber the poor young creature opened her eyes. The moon shone brightly; when shivering with the cold, damp air of the vault (it being the month of October), she attempted to raise herself up, and in a short time began to recognize the place in which she lay. Commending herself to the mercy of Heaven, and all its guardian saints, she next strove to release herself from her unearthly garments, and perceiving a glimmer of light through a crevice in the door, she succeeded, though faint and exhausted, in reaching the entrance of the vault. Having mounted the steps, by degrees she removed a portion of the covering least secured, through which she had observed the light, and at length, with extreme difficulty, issued forth. Terror and despair had hitherto given her strength, while the cold air now braced her nerves, and thinly clad as she was, she pursued her way (hence called *Via della Morte*) towards her husband's house, along the *Corso degli Adimari*, now named *Via Dei Calzajoli*, and along some by-streets, until she reached her own door. Her husband, who happened to be sitting sorrowfully over the fire just before retiring to rest, himself went to the door, and on beholding such a figure, and hearing a low and plaintive voice, he started back, and made the sign of the cross, believing it was a spirit. Then invoking her to depart, he hastily shut the door in her face, and went trembling to bed, vowing to have more masses and alms offered up the following day for the repose of her soul.

Ginevra wept. "Is this the love," she cried, "he should have borne me! Alas! alas! what shall I do? Must I perish of cold and hunger in the streets?" Then recollecting her father's house, she pursued her weary way thither; but he was from home, and her mother, from an upper story, hearing a weak, plaintive voice, interrupted with sobs and shiverings, exclaimed in a paroxysm of pious fear: "Get thee gone in peace, blessed spirit," and shut down the window, in hopes that she had laid the ghost. The wretched girl then wringing her hands, resumed her way, and attempted to reach the abode of one of her uncles, resting frequently as she went; yet, after all, she

found her toil still unrecompensed, receiving the same reply wherever she went "Get thee gone in peace", after which polite reception the door was closed in her face. At length, weary with suffering, she laid herself down to sleep, or rather to die, under the little lodge of San Bartolommeo, when just before closing her eyes, she bethought herself, as a last resource, of her former lover from whom she was then at no great distance.

Yet what reception," she mentally exclaimed, "ought I to expect after the slights and ill treatment that he has met with at the hands of me and my family, when I consider too how those who professed to love me have driven me from their doors!" It was with a misgiving heart then that she knocked at Antonio's door. Whether or not we are to suppose that he possessed superior strength of courage or of love, beyond all her natural relatives whom she had tried, certain it is, that instead of being terrified at her appearance, he advanced boldly and even eagerly towards her gazing upon her with fixed looks, and drawing his breath deeply then apparently recognizing her, he exclaimed in a kind and gentle tone 'Art thou indeed Ginevra or her pure and sainted spirit?' and the next moment he felt her, a living and breathing woman, in his arms! Calling out loudly for assistance, his mother and servants came running to inquire what had happened, most of whom, on beholding her, ran away again faster than they had approached. But the happy Antonio, bearing her in his arms had her speedily wrapped in warm linen, and placed upon a couch, between his mother and another female, in order to restore her to a natural warmth. Still he indulged fears that she would not revive, while he availed himself of everything that art or nature could furnish to cherish the vital flame. It would be difficult to decide, whether, as he watched her gradually reviving, his feeling of unutterable joy was not greater than had been that of his overwhelming grief, on first hearing tidings that her beloved spirit had fled. He lingered around her bed or was ever at her side, unwilling to trust her even to the most confidential servants of the household, and administering every cordial to her with his own hand. When she was at last enabled to sit up, she fell at her benefactors at her lover's feet and while she poured forth her unutterable gratitude in floods of tears, and passionate exclamations, she yet with her characteristic purity and virtue besought him to have pity on her to respect her honour, and to add to all his generosity and tenderness, the disinterestedness of a true

friend. For he knew, she continued, that there was nothing she could, nothing she ought to deny him, after such unheard-of kindness, and that she was henceforward his handmaid and his slave. Still, she should prefer death to the loss of virtue or of reputation; and if he truly loved her, he would respect them; and that he did love her as none ever before loved, was evident in the charity, courage, and true tenderness with which he had taken her to his arms, when husband, father, mother, and all friends and relatives forsook her.

Antonio, delighted to dwell upon her voice, hung enraptured over her, as she spoke, and then falling before her upon his knees, he entreated her forgiveness, if he had in the slightest instance forgotten himself, or transgressed the strictest bounds prescribed by reverence and honour. She could only answer him with a fresh gush of tears, as she pressed his hands with tremulous emotion to her heart and lips; while, soothing her alarm, the kind Antonio assured her that she owed him nothing, that he was more than sufficiently rewarded in beholding her restoration to health and beauty, and that he wished, and would accept, nothing from her but gratitude alone.

Did she, he continued, with an expression of anguish and alarm, insist upon being instantly restored to her husband's arms? then let her speak it. "Hesitate not, spare me not," he cried; "I will do it, though I die for it!" "Ah! never, never!" exclaimed the wretched girl; "wedded though I be, I will not see him, I will not dwell with him more. Let me rather fly to a nunnery, and again become buried alive for ever. Besides, death hath dissolved our union: I was dead to him: nay, he interred me, and but now drove me from his presence. Mention him no more," she continued, "for were it requisite, I would appeal to our tribunal, to every tribunal upon earth! Have they not all, moreover, numbered me with the dead, and rejected me when I rose from the grave by little less than a miracle?" The delighted Antonio, on receiving these sweet assurances, could only fall at her feet, and thank her with his tears; but they were tears of ecstatic pleasure, soon smiled and kissed away. For, as if to promote the wishes which both in their secret hearts indulged, Agolanti, the former husband of the lady, being of a covetous disposition, disposed of the whole of her ornaments and dresses, which Antonio, who had his eye upon all the proceedings of her relations, very soon contrived to get into his own hands. Agolanti, shortly afterwards, meeting with a lady

*of fortune, paid his addresses to her, upon which, Antonio and his beautiful Ginevra no longer hesitating what course to pursue resolved to secure the blissful object they had in view, and to unite their fate everlastingly in one.* The new marriage deeds being therefore drawn out according to the usual forms, without the knowledge of even her nearest relatives, who had scarcely yet finished offering up masses for her soul, of which they imagined from what they had seen, that she stood in the utmost need she proceeded to church early one Sunday morning to confer her hand upon the happy Antonio. Her future mother in law with a single servant and Antonio following them, as if going to hear mass, formed the whole of the wedding party. When just on the point of entering the church, they encountered another procession it was that of her late husband Agolanti, her mother and other friends proceeding exactly on the same destination. What was here to be done? and which did it behove to yield precedence to the other? With the greatest presence of mind Antonio's bride accosted her mother, who in some surprise and terror, with the rest of the party, kept at a respectful distance. Yet it being daylight, and observing Ginevra so well dressed and looking so beautiful and so happy, they felt somewhat reassured when she accosted them, and briefly informed them that as her physicians had given her over the priest administered extreme unction, and her friends and relatives performed her last obsequies, she had taken her final leave and no longer belonged to them, that it was plain moreover, that they wished it to be so, for that after she had been miraculously restored to them, no one had taken the least notice of her but on the other hand had driven her from her own doors that he alone, from whom she expected least, had received her like a good Samantan, and opened his house and arms to her restoring her to life and love, and that by all the laws of heaven and earth she would henceforth be his for without his assistance she must assuredly have died so that, having every claim to her gratitude she had consented to become wholly his. Then taking a hasty farewell of her mother and her friends the parties separated not choosing to perform the respective ceremonies at the same time, and in the same church. Upon their return after the marriage feast was concluded a messenger arrived with an order from the bishop, and in the presence of her former husband summoned for the occasion, the prelate declared the ecclesiastical sentence, of which the tenor

ran: that the fair Ginevra should remain the wife of Antonio, and that her former husband should restore the whole of her dower, since it was clear that the lady had been dead and buried, but, to the glory of the Church, had been miraculously restored.

## LET IT REST

CARLO GOZZI

A CERTAIN COUNT a great master of the whip, and well known in the sporting circles, was busily engaged in breaking in a fine young horse, which he intended for his chariot. For this purpose he put him in harness with another steed accustomed to the bit and passed the greater part of the day flourishing his lash on his own coach box, in the greatest style. By merely shaking the reins he could put them to all their paces, to amble, trot and gallop at pleasure. In fact, though the beast was very stubborn he had nearly mastered him, of which he was not a little vain as he had had many hairbreadth escapes, and encountered infinite perils in the task. Every time he turned out being twice a day at least he put the streets in an uproar, the wheels the voice, the whip, and the horses' hoofs, all uniting to produce a most discordant concourse of rude sounds. The passengers fled in all directions, bestowing their maledictions upon him while the windows were crowded with heads thrust out to behold the cause of such a hideous din. This was his great triumph and delight and added fresh ardour to his jockeyship until unluckily on one occasion, transported beyond all bounds he attempted to accomplish a very difficult turn, when the road being drenched in rain, brought steed, chariot, and charioteer, in all their pride with a tremendous and ruinous clatter down to the ground. But the invincible hero soon resumed his seat brandished his whip, shouted threatened, and swore, but it was all in vain, the unlucky horse lay quite still, and nothing could induce him to rise. Dreading lest his reputation should suffer from this event, and the people no longer run in crowds to behold the famous Orlando and his Vegliantino pass along he became doubly anxious to retrieve his credit, and called all his lackeys to his assistance. But the poor beast lay so completely bound down in his harness, with half the relics of his chariot upon his back, that it would have been easier to untie the Gordian knot than to extricate him. The

noble count, overwhelmed with shame at his defeat, sprang from his seat, ran to the horse's head, and tried a variety of expedients to raise him from the ground. But whistling, kicking, flogging, and persuading were equally ineffectual; the poor beast being far too much entangled to attend to them. He only snorted and foamed, and bit and kicked, in answer to every expedient proposed to him by his master. So, finding that he could do nothing with the horse, he determined to try his hand on the coach, and with the assistance of all present, he attempted to lift it off the beast's back, another party acting simultaneously to free the horse, by pinching, pulling, and drawing him by the ears and tail, in order to produce some impression upon him. But this was only attended with the same success as before: they were, in short, compelled to desist. As in very desperate cases, every man thinks himself entitled to give an opinion, so now in the count's, or rather his horse's utter extremity, all proposed contradictory plans, believing themselves full as able and profound mechanics, in the art of raising up a given weight, as either an Euclid or an Archimedes. Yet nothing was effected, except harassing the poor beast, who expressed the most decided objection to getting up, as if desirous of disgracing his master for his unskilful conduct, or perhaps anxious to keep out of his way, and no longer to tempt the whip. The count was plunged in grief and despair! But just at this time it happened that one Moscione, a wag, passed that way, who, beholding the tumult and fracas at a distance, hastened towards the spot, and shouting with a voice of authority, ran among them: "Stand back, I say, keep quiet there! a plague upon the idiots, let the horse alone! Leave him to me, I say! You are the Pope's soldiers with a vengeance, and, I dare say, could work if you had a whip at your back; but without it you will do nothing!" The count, hearing his confident and authoritative language, began to take breath, flattering himself that he had found a very Solomon; and, reiterating his command, bade all the people make way, and let him proceed to work.

So Moscione, casting a knowing look on the whole concern, bit his lips and frowned, and then apparently proceeded to a minute examination, often stopping, as if considering very deeply the remedy in view. The spectators, in spite of his abuse of them, stood looking on with an air of respect and reverence, with the count at their head, his eyes and mouth wide open, expecting to see him perform little less than a miracle. After

completing his examination, and reflecting for a long time during which the people around stood as still as death Moscione turned short upon the count, and said Let the beast rest! And having uttered this he quietly went his way

When the people had a little recovered from their surprise they burst into immoderate fits of laughter, chiefly directed at the count, who, for a long time, stood waiting for his return believing that he was gone to seek for some new mechanical apparatus for raising his horse But he might have stood there until the day of judgment, no Moscione appeared there any more He was, finally, compelled to have his chariot taken away piecemeal, while his fine young steed was dragged to the stables useless, at least for the count's purposes, ever afterwards

At first he vowed to be revenged upon the impertinent wag, Moscione but the latter only said laughing ' Let him prove that I did him any injury, and I will pay the damages and in this way he kept up the laugh against the count a proper reward for his extreme vanity and folly

## THE SENTINEL

FRANCESCO SOAVE

It was during the late severe season, a winter remarkable for its long and inclement frost, experienced with equal rigour throughout Italy, France, and Germany, where the largest rivers were rapidly congealed, and people were seen to fall dead with cold, that in the French town of Metz, a poor sentinel was sent upon guard on one of the bitterest nights, when a fierce north wind added to the usual cold. His watch was in the most exposed situation of the place, and he had scarcely recovered from a severe indisposition; but he was a soldier, and declared his readiness to take his round. It chanced that he had pledged his affections to a young woman of the same city, who no sooner heard of his being on duty, than she began to lament bitterly, declaring it to be impossible for him to survive the insufferable severity of such a night, after the illness under which he still lingered. Tormented with anxiety, she was unable to close her eyes, or even to retire to rest; and as the night advanced, the cold becoming more intense, her fancy depicted him struggling against the fearful elements, and his own weakness; and at length, no longer able to support himself, overpowered with slumber, and sinking to eternal rest upon the ground. Maddened at the idea, and heedless of consequences, she hastily clothed herself as warmly as she could, ran out of the house, situated not far from the place of watch, and with the utmost courage arrived alone at the spot. And there she indeed found her poor soldier nearly as exhausted as she had imagined, being with difficulty able to keep his feet, owing to the intenseness of the frost. She earnestly conjured him to hasten, though only for a little while, to revive himself at her house; when having taken some refreshment, he might return; but aware of the consequences of such a step, this he kindly though resolutely refused to do. "But only for a few minutes," she continued, "while you melt the horrid frost, which has almost congealed you alive." "Not an instant," returned the

soldier, 'it were certain death even to stir from the spot' 'Surely not!' cried the affectionate girl 'it will never be known and if you stay, your death will be still more certain you have at least a chance and it is your duty, if possible, to preserve your life Besides, should your absence happen to be discovered heaven will take pity upon us, and provide in some way for your preservation' Yes, said the soldier,

but that is not the question, for suppose I can do it with impunity, is it noble or honourable thus vilely to abandon my post without any one upon guard?' But there will be someone if you consent to go I will remain here until you return I am not in the least afraid so be quick, and give me your arms

This request she enforced with so much eloquence and tenderness and so many tears that the poor soldier, against his better judgment was fain to yield more especially as he felt himself becoming fainter and fainter, and unable much longer to resist the cold Intending to return within a few minutes, he left the kind hearted girl in his place, wrapping her in his cloak, and giving her his arms and cap, together with the watchword and such was her delight at the idea of having saved the life of her beloved that she was for a time insensible to the intense severity of the weather But just as she was flattering herself with the hope of his return an officer made his appearance who as she forgot in her confusion to give the sign, suspected that the soldier had either fallen asleep or fled What was his surprise on rushing to the spot to find a young girl, overpowered alarm and unable to give any account of herself, from extreme agitation and tears

instantly conducted to the guard house and restored to a degree of confidence, the poor girl confessed the whole thing with the anguish of doubt and distraction, a betrothed husband He was instantly summoned but was found in such a state of weakness from what he had undergone, as to leave little prospect of recovery

It was with much difficulty, with the aid of his friends and the advice of the physician, that he was restored sufficiently to give an account of himself, after which he was allowed to remain in the guard house to await the period of his trial

He had been for me he exclaimed, on being asked how he felt 'far happier to have died at my post for a cruel and ignominious death than to live on such was the politic severity

of martial law, as he had well foreseen, that he was condemned to be executed within a few days after his sentence. Great as was his affliction on hearing these tidings, it was little in comparison with the remorse and terror that distracted the breast of his beloved girl, who, in addition to the grief of losing him, in so public and ignominious a manner, accused herself as the cause of the whole calamity. He, to whom she had been so long and tenderly attached, was now to fall as it were by the hand of his betrothed bride! Such was the strangeness and suddenness of the event, that her feelings being wrought up to the highest pitch of excitation and terror, her very despair seemed to give her strength; and, casting all fear of consequences aside, she made a vow to save him, or to perish in the attempt. Bitterly weeping, and with dishevelled hair, she ran wildly through the city, beseeching pity and compassion from all her friends and acquaintance, and soliciting everybody of rank and influence to unite in petitioning for a pardon for her lover, or that her life, she being the sole author of the fault, might be accepted in the place of his.

The circumstances being made known, such was the tenderness and compassion excited in her behalf, and such the admiration of her conduct, at once so affectionate and spirited, that persons of the highest rank became interested for her, and used the most laudable efforts to obtain a free pardon for the poor soldier. The ladies of the place also exerting their influence, the governor, no longer proof against this torrent of public feeling, made a merit of granting him forgiveness, on the condition of his being immediately united to the heroic and noble-hearted girl, and accepting with her a small donation, an example which was speedily followed by people of every rank, so that the young bride had the additional pleasure of presenting her beloved with a handsome dower, which satisfied their moderate wishes, and crowned their humble happiness.

# THE STORY OF LUDOVICO

ALESSANDRO MANZONI

FATHER CRISTOFORO had not always been thus nor had he always been Cristoforo his baptismal name was Ludovico He was the son of a merchant of \* \* \* \* (these asterisks are all inserted by the circumspection of our anonymous author) who in his latter years being considerably wealthy, and having only one son had given up trade, and retired as an independent gentleman

In his new state of idleness he began to entertain a great contempt for the time he had spent in making money, and being useful in the world Full of this fancy, he used every endeavour to make others forget that he had been a merchant in fact, he wished to forget it himself But the warehouse the bales the journal the measure were for ever intruding upon his mind like the shade of Banquo to Macbeth even amidst the honours of the table and the smiles of flatterers It is impossible to describe the care of these poor mortals to avoid every word that might appear like an allusion to the former condition of their patron One day to mention a single instance towards the end of dinner in the moment of liveliest and most unrestrained festivity when it would be difficult to say which was merriest the company who emptied the table, or the host who filled it he was rallying with friendly superiority one of his guests the most prodigious eater in the world He meaning to return the joke with the frankness of a child and without the least shade of malice replied 'Ah I'm listening like a merchant.' The poor offender was at once conscious of the unfortunate word that had escaped his lips he cast a diffident glance towards his patron's clouded face and each would gladly have resumed his former expression but it was impossible The other guests occupied themselves each in his own mind in devising some plan of remedying the mistake and making a diversion but the silence thus occasioned only made the error more apparent Each individual endeavoured to avoid meeting his companion's

eye; each felt that all were occupied in the thought they wished to conceal. Cheerfulness and sociability had fled for that day, and the poor man, not so much imprudent as unfortunate, never again received an invitation. In this manner, Ludovico's father passed his latter years, continually subject to annoyances, and perpetually in dread of being despised; never reflecting that it was no more contemptuous to sell than to buy, and that the business of which he was now so much ashamed, had been carried on for many years before the public without regret. He gave his son an expensive education, according to the judgment of the times, and as far as he was permitted by the laws and customs of the country; he procured him masters in the different branches of literature and in exercises of horsemanship, and at last died, leaving the youth heir to a large fortune. Ludovico had acquired gentlemanly habits and feelings, and the flatterers by whom he had been surrounded had accustomed him to be treated with the greatest respect. But when he endeavoured to mix with the first men of the city, he met with very different treatment to what he had been accustomed to, and he began to perceive that, if he would be admitted into their society, as he desired, he must learn, in a new school, to be patient and submissive, and every moment to be looked down upon and despised.

Such a mode of life accorded neither with the education of Ludovico, nor with his disposition, and he withdrew from it, highly piqued. Still he absented himself unwillingly; it appeared to him that these ought really to have been his companions, only he wanted them to be a little more tractable. With this mixture of dislike and inclination, not being able to make them his familiar associates, yet wishing in some way to be connected with them, he endeavoured to rival them in show and magnificence, thus purchasing for himself enmity, jealousy, and ridicule. His disposition, open and at the same time violent, had occasionally engaged him in more serious contentions. He had a natural and sincere horror of fraud and oppression—a horror rendered still more vivid by the rank of those whom he saw daily committing them—exactly the persons he hated. To appease, or to excite all these passions at once, he readily took the part of the weak and oppressed, assumed the office of arbitrator, and intermeddling in one dispute, drew himself into others; so that by degrees he established his character as a protector of the oppressed, and a vindicator of injuries. The

employment, however, was troublesome, and it need not be asked whether poor Ludovico met with enemies, untoward accidents, and vexations of spirit. Besides the external war he had to maintain, he was continually harassed by internal strifes. For, in order to carry out his undertakings (not to speak of such as never were carried out), he was often obliged to make use of subterfuges, and have recourse to violence which his conscience could not approve. He was compelled to keep around him a great number of bravoës, and, as much for his own security as to ensure vigorous assistance, he had to choose the most daring or, in other words, the most unprincipled, and thus to live with villains for the sake of justice. Yet on more than one occasion, either discouraged by ill success, or disquieted by imminent danger, wearied by a state of constant defence, disgusted with his companions, and in apprehension of dissipating his property, which was daily drawn upon largely, either in a good cause or an support of his bold enterprises—more than once he had taken a fancy to turn friar, for in these times, this was the commonest way of escaping difficulties. This idea would probably have been only a fancy all his life, had it not been changed to a resolution by a more serious and terrible accident than he had yet met with.

He was walking one day along the streets, in company with a former shopkeeper whom his father had raised to the office of steward, and was followed by two bravoës. The steward, whose name was Cristoforo, was about fifty years old, devoted from childhood to his master, whom he had known from his birth, and by whose wages and liberality he was himself supported with his wife and eight children. Ludovico perceived a gentleman at a distance, an arrogant and overbearing man, whom he had never spoken to in his life, but his cordial enemy, to whom Ludovico heartily returned the hatred, for it is a singular advantage of this world, that men may hate and be hated without knowing each other. The signor, followed by four bravoës, advanced haughtily with a proud step, his head raised, and his mouth expressive of insolence and contempt. They both walked next to the wall, which (be it observed) was on Ludovico's right hand and this, according to custom, gave him the right (how far people will go to pursue the *right* of a case!) of not moving from the said wall to give place to any one, to which custom at that time, great importance was attached. The signor, on the contrary, in virtue of another custom, held that

this right ought to be conceded to him in consideration of his rank, and that it was Ludovico's part to give way. So that in this, as it happens in many other cases, two opposing customs clashed, the question of which was to have the preference remaining undecided, thus giving occasions of dispute, whenever one hard head chanced to come in contact with another of the same nature. The foes approached each other, both close to the wall, like two walking figures in bas-relief, and on finding themselves face to face, the signor, eyeing Ludovico with a haughty air and imperious frown, said, in a corresponding tone of voice: "Go to the outside."

"You go yourself," replied Ludovico; "the path is mine."

"With men of your rank the path is always mine."

"Yes, if the arrogance of men of your rank were a law for men of mine."

The two trains of attendants stood still, each behind its leader, fiercely regarding each other, with their hands on their daggers prepared for battle, while the passers-by stopped on their way and withdrew into the road, placing themselves at a distance to observe the issue; the presence of these spectators continually animating the punctilio of the disputants.

"To the outside, vile mechanic! or I'll quickly teach you the civility you owe a gentleman."

"You lie: I am not vile."

"You lie, if you say I lie." This reply was pragmatical.

"And if you were a gentleman, as I am," added the signor, "I would prove with the sword that you are the liar."

"That is a capital pretext for dispensing with the trouble of maintaining the insolence of your words by your deeds."

"Throw this rascal in the mud," said the signor, turning to his followers.

"We shall see," said Ludovico, immediately retiring a step, and laying his hand on his sword.

"Rash man!" cried the other, drawing his own, "I will break this when it is stained with your vile blood."

At these words they flew upon one another, the attendants of the two parties fighting in defence of their masters. The combat was unequal, both in number, and because Ludovico aimed rather at parrying the blows of, and disarming, his enemy than killing him, while the signor was resolved upon his foe's death at any cost. Ludovico had already received a blow from the dagger of one of the bravos in his left arm, and a slight

wound on his cheek, and his principal enemy was pressing on to make an end of him, when Cristoforo, seeing his master in extreme peril, went behind the signor with his dagger, who, turning all his fury upon his new enemy, ran him through with his sword. At this sight Ludovico, as if beside himself, buried his own in the body of his provoker, and laid him at his feet, almost at the same moment as the unfortunate Cristoforo. The followers of the signor, seeing him on the ground, immediately betook themselves to flight: those of Ludovico, wounded and beaten, having no longer any one to fight with, and not wishing to be mingled in the rapidly increasing multitude, fled the other way, and Ludovico was left alone in the midst of the crowd, with these two ill-fated companions lying at his feet.

"What's the matter? There's one—There are two—They have pierced his body—Who has been murdered?—That tyrant—Oh, Holy Mary, what a confusion!—Seek, and you shall find—One moment pays all—So he is gone!—What a blow!—It must be a serious affair—And this other poor fellow!—Mercy! what a sight!—Save him, save him!—It will go hard with him too—See how he is mangled! he is covered with blood—Escape, poor fellow, escape!—Take care you are not caught."

These words predominating over the confused tumult of the crowd, expressed their prevailing opinion, while assistance accompanied the advice. The scene had taken place near a Capuchin convent, an asylum in those days, as every one knows, impenetrable to bailiffs, and all that complication of persons and things which went by the name of justice. The wounded and almost senseless murderer was conducted, or rather carried by the crowd, and delivered to the monks with the recommendation "He is a worthy man who has made a proud tyrant cold, he was provoked to it, and did it in his own defence."

Ludovico had never before shed blood, and although homicide was in those times so common that every one was accustomed to hear of and witness it, yet the impression made on his mind by the sight of one man murdered *for him*, and another *by him*, was new and indescribable—a disclosure of sentiments before unknown. The fall of his enemy, the sudden alteration of the features, passing in a moment from a threatening and furious expression to the calm and solemn stillness of death, was a sight that instantly changed the feelings of the murderer. He was dragged to the convent almost without knowing where he was, or what they were doing to him, and when his memory

returned, he found himself on a bed in the infirmary, attended by a surgeon-friar (for the Capuchins generally had one in each convent), who was applying lint and bandages to the two wounds he had received in the contest. A Father, whose special office it was to attend upon the dying, and who had frequently been called upon to exercise his duties in the street, was quickly summoned to the place of combat. He returned a few minutes afterwards, and entering the infirmary, approached the bed where Ludovico lay. "Comfort yourself," said he, "he has at least died calmly, and has charged me to ask your pardon, and to convey his to you." These words aroused poor Ludovico, and awakened more vividly and distinctly the feelings which confusedly crowded upon his mind: sorrow for his friend, consternation and remorse for the blow that had escaped his hand, and at the same time a bitterly painful compassion for the man he had slain. "And the other?" anxiously demanded he of the friar.

"The other had expired when I arrived."

In the meanwhile, the gates and precincts of the convent swarmed with idle and inquisitive people; but on the arrival of a body of constables, they dispersed the crowd, and placed themselves in ambush at a short distance from the doors, so that none might go out unobserved. A brother of the deceased, however, accompanied by two of his cousins and an aged uncle, came, armed cap-à-pie, with a powerful retinue of bravoës, and began to make the circuit of the convent, watching with looks and gestures of threatening contempt the idle bystanders, who did not dare say, He is out of your reach, though they had it written on their faces.

As soon as Ludovico could collect his scattered thoughts, he asked for the Father Confessor, and begged that he would seek the widow of Cristoforo, ask forgiveness in his name for his having been the involuntary cause of her desolation, and at the same time assure her that he would undertake to provide for her destitute family. In reflecting on his own condition, the wish to become a friar, which he had often before revolved in his mind, revived with double force and earnestness; it seemed as if God Himself, by bringing him to a convent just at this juncture, had put it in his way, and given him a sign of His will, and his resolution was taken. He therefore called the guardian, and told him of his intention. The Superior replied, that he must beware of forming precipitate resolutions, but

that if, on consideration, he persisted in his desire, he would not be refused. He then sent for a notary, and made an assignment of the whole of his property (which was no insignificant amount) to the family of *Gustoforo* a certain sum to the widow, as if it were an entailed dowry, and the remainder to the children.

The resolution of *Ludovico* came very apropos for his hosts who were in a sad dilemma on his account. To send him away from the convent, and thus expose him to justice, that is to say to the vengeance of his enemies was a course on which they would not for a moment bestow a thought. It would have been to give up their proper privileges, disgrace the convent in the eyes of the people, draw upon themselves the animadversion of all the Capuchins in the universe for suffering their common rights to be infringed upon, and arouse all the ecclesiastical authorities who at that time considered themselves the lawful guardians of these rights. On the other hand, the kindred of the slain powerful themselves and strong in adherents, were prepared to take vengeance, and denounced as their enemy any one who should put an obstacle in their way. The history does not tell us that much grief was felt for the loss of the deceased, nor even that a single tear was shed over him by any of his relations: it merely says that they were all on fire to have the murderer dead or living in their power. But *Ludovico's* assuming the habit of a Capuchin settled all these difficulties: he made atonement in a manner, imposed a penance on himself, tacitly confessed himself in fault, and withdrew from the contest: he was in fact an enemy laying down his arms. The relatives of the dead could also, if they pleased, believe and make it their boast that he had turned snar in despair, and through dread of their vengeance. But in any case, to oblige a man to relinquish his property, shave his head, and walk barefoot to sleep on straw, and to live upon alms was surely a punishment fully equivalent to the most heinous offence.

The Superior presented himself with an easy humility to the brother of the deceased and after a thousand protestations of respect for his most illustrious house, and of desire to comply with his wishes as far as was possible, he spoke of *Ludovico's* penitence and the determination he had made, politely making it appear that his family ought to be therewith satisfied, and insinuating yet more courteously, and with still greater dexterity that whether he were pleased or not so it would be. The brother fell into a rage, which, the Capuchin patiently allowed

to evaporate, occasionally remarking that he had too just cause of sorrow. The signor also gave him to understand, that in any case his family had it in their power to enforce satisfaction, to which the Capuchin, whatever he might think, did not say no; and finally he asked, or rather required as a condition, that the murderer of his brother should immediately quit the city. The Capuchin, who had already determined upon such a course, replied that it should be as he wished, leaving the nobleman to believe, if he chose, that his compliance was an act of obedience; and thus the matter concluded to the satisfaction of all parties. The family were released from their obligation; the friars had rescued a fellow-creature, and secured their own privileges, without making themselves enemies; the dilettanti in chivalry gladly saw the affair terminated in so laudable a manner; the populace rejoiced at a worthy man's escaping from danger, and at the same time marvelled at his conversion; finally, and above all, in the midst of his sorrow, it was a consolation to poor Ludovico himself, to enter upon a life of expiation, and devote himself to services, which, though they could not remedy, might at least make some atonement, for his unhappy deed, and alleviate the intolerable pangs of remorse. The idea that his resolution might be attributed to fear pained him for a moment, but he quickly consoled himself by the remembrance that even this unjust imputation would be a punishraent for him, and a means of expiation. Thus, at the age of thirty, Ludovico took the monastic habit, and being required, according to custom, to change his name, he chose one that would continually remind him of the fault he had to atone for—the name of Friar Cristoforo.

Scarcely was the ceremony of taking the religious habit completed, when the guardian told him that he must keep his novitiate at \* \* \*, sixty miles distant, and that he must leave the next day. The novice bowed respectfully, and requested a favour of him. "Allow me, Father," said he, "before I quit the city where I have shed the blood of a fellow-creature, and leave a family justly offended with me, to make what satisfaction I can by at least confessing my sorrow, begging forgiveness of the brother of the deceased, and so removing, please God, the enmity he feels towards me." The guardian, thinking that such an act, besides being good in itself, would also serve still more to reconcile the family to the convent, instantly repaired to the offended signor's house, and communicated to him Friar

Cristoforo's request. The signor, greatly surprised at so unexpected a proposal, felt a rising of anger, mingled perhaps with complacency, and after thinking a moment, "Let him come to-morrow," said he, mentioning the hour, and the Superior returned to the monastery to acquaint the novice with the desired permission.

The gentleman soon remembered that the more solemn and notorious the submission was, the more his influence and importance would be increased among his friends and the public, and it would also (to use a fashionable modern expression) make a fine page in the history of the family. He therefore hastily sent to inform all his relatives, that the next day at noon they must hold themselves engaged to come to him for the purpose of receiving a common satisfaction. At midday the palace swarmed with the nobility of both sexes and of every age, occasioning a confused intermingling of large cloaks, lofty plumes, and pendent jewels, a vibrating movement of stiffened and curled ribbons, an impeded trailing of embroidered trains. The ante-rooms, courtyards, and roads overflowed with servants, pages, braves, and inquisitive gazers. On seeing all this preparation Friar Cristoforo guessed the motive, and felt a momentary perturbation, but he soon recovered himself, and said

"Be it so. I committed the murder publicly, in the presence of many of his enemies, that was an injury, this is reparation." So with the Father, his companion, at his side, and his eyes bent on the ground, he passed the threshold, traversed the courtyard among a crowd who eyed him with very uncereemonious curiosity, ascended the stairs, and in the midst of another crowd of nobles who gave way at his approach, was ushered, with a thousand eyes upon him, into the presence of the master of the mansion, who, surrounded by his nearest relatives, stood in the centre of the room with a downcast look, grasping in his left hand the hilt of his sword, while with the right he folded the collar of his cloak over his breast.

There is sometimes in the face and behaviour of a person so direct an expression, such an effusion, so to speak, of the internal soul that in a crowd of spectators there will be but one judgment and opinion of him. So was it with Friar Cristoforo, his face and behaviour plainly expressed to the bystanders that he had not become a friar, nor submitted to that humiliation, from the fear of man, and the discovery immediately conciliated all hearts. On perceiving the offended signor, he quickened his

steps, fell on his knees at his feet, crossed his hands on his breast, and bending his shaved head, said: "I am the murderer of your brother. God knows how gladly I would restore him to you at the price of my own blood, but it cannot be: I can only make inefficacious and tardy excuses, and implore you to accept them for God's sake." All eyes were immovably fixed upon the novice and the illustrious personage he was addressing; all ears were attentively listening; and when Friar Cristoforo ceased, there was a murmur of compassion and respect throughout the room. The gentleman, who stood in an attitude of forced condescension and restrained anger, was much moved at these words, and bending towards the suppliant, "Rise," said he, in an altered tone. "The offence—the act certainly—but the habit you bear—not only so, but also yourself—Rise, Father—My brother—I cannot deny it—was a cavalier—was rather a—precipitate man—rather hasty. But all happens by God's appointment. Speak of it no more. . . . But, Father, you must not remain in this posture." And taking him by the arm, he compelled him to rise. The friar, standing with his head bowed, and his eyes fixed on the ground, replied: "I may hope then that I have your forgiveness? And if I obtain it from you, from whom may I not hope it? Oh! if I might hear from your lips that one word—pardon!"

"Pardon!" said the gentleman. "You no longer need it. But since you desire it, certainly . . . certainly, I pardon you with my whole heart, and all——"

"All! all!" exclaimed the bystanders, with one voice. The countenance of the friar expanded with grateful joy, under which, however, might be traced an humble and deep compunction for the evil which the forgiveness of men could not repair. The gentleman, overcome by this deportment, and urged forward by the general feeling, threw his arms round Cristoforo's neck, and gave and received the kiss of peace.

"Bravo! well done!" burst forth from all parts of the room: there was a general movement, and all gathered round the friar. Servants immediately entered, bringing abundance of refreshment. The signor, again addressing Cristoforo, who was preparing to retire, said: "Father, let me give you some of these trifles; afford me this proof of your friendship"; and was on the point of helping him before any of the others; but he, drawing back with a kind of friendly resistance, "These things," said he, "are no longer for me; but God forbid that I should refuse your

gifts I am about to start on my journey, allow me to take a loaf of bread, that I may be able to say I have shared your charity, eaten of your bread, and received a token of your forgiveness." The nobleman, much affected, ordered it to be brought, and shortly a waiter entered in full dress, bearing the loaf on a silver dish, and presented it to the Father, who took it with many thanks, and put it in his basket. Then, obtaining permission to depart he bade farewell to the master of the house and those who stood nearest to him, and with difficulty made his escape as they endeavoured for a moment to impede his progress, while, in the ante-rooms, he had to struggle to free himself from the servants, and even from the braves, who kissed the hem of his garment, his rope, and his hood. At last he reached the street, borne along as in triumph, and accompanied by a crowd of people as far as the gate of the city, from whence he commenced his pedestrian journey towards the place of his novitiate.

The brother and other relatives of the deceased, who had been prepared in the morning to enjoy the sad triumph of pride, were left instead full of the serene joy of a forgiving and benevolent disposition. The company entertained themselves some time longer, with feelings of unusual kindness and cordiality, in discussions of a very different character to what they had anticipated on assembling. Instead of satisfaction enforced, insults avenged, and obligations discharged, praises of the novice reconciliation and meekness, were the topics of conversation. And he who, for the fiftieth time, would have recounted how Count Muzio, his father, had served the Marquis Stanislao (a violent, boastful man, as every one is aware), in a well known encounter of the same kind, related, instead, the penitence and wonderful patience of one Friar Simone, who had died many years before. When the party had dispersed, the signor, still considerably agitated, reconsidered with surprise what he had heard and had himself expressed, and muttered between his teeth. "The devil of a friar!" (we must record his exact words) "The devil of a friar!—if he had knelt there a few moments longer, I should almost have begged his pardon for his having murdered my brother." Our story expressly notes that from that day forward he became a little less impetuous, and rather more tractable.

## THE MARK OF LOVE

GIOVANNI VERGA

"I have lost . . . oh, dear Nice,  
Repose . . . night's quiet repose.  
Oh, swiftly grant me . . . grant swift death,  
Grant swift death, when I am near thee!"

sang Resca, scraping away at his guitar, embellishing the song by opening wide his mouth and knitting his brows. The strumming of the accompaniment had hardly ceased when at the corner of the Piano dell' Orbo there broke out a long, raucous applause. The friends slung their guitars round their necks and gathered round Resca, talking softly, behind the entrance of Concettina the fruiterer. As the little wicket-door remained closed, Resca said:

"That means the old woman isn't asleep yet. Good night, friends."

Then from the great arch beneath the Carmelite monastery a shadow slipped out very quietly, came up to them, and addressed them with studied affability:

"Well done, gentlemen! Fine voices and fine instruments!"

Resca stared hard at the stranger, a small, thin man, with a week's growth of beard, wearing a felt hat all on one side; he passed the ribbon of the guitar over his shoulder and answered, very drily:

"Thanks!"

"Now you must do me a favour, gentlemen," the other went on. "You must come and sing another song to my sweetheart, who lives close by."

The friends, seeing the turn the talk was taking, looked at each other, very serious. Resca, who was not at all anxious to pick a quarrel there at that hour, stared the stranger full in the eyes, under the street lamp, and said, letting his words come very slowly:

"Excuse us, friend. It is late, and we must go about our own affairs."

The other, however, would not admit defeat

"A very, very little song, here, two steps away

Resca pulled his cap over his eyes and asked quietly, in a queer voice

"What is it? Do you want to force us?"

"You're five            How could I?"

'Then let us go in peace'

'Then I tell you, you've no manners'

Resca took a step backwards and seized his guitar sharply by its neck. But he restrained himself, and said once more

I tell you to let me go about my own business"

Then I tell you that you have no manners!' the other flung back very coldly, his hands in his pockets

"Hell!"

The groups broke up abruptly, with a sudden flicker of knives. The little man, who had jumped back, putting his back to the wall, exclaimed

'Sh! Hell!            The police!'

Close by was the scaffolding of a house being built, and in a flash the knives disappeared behind a partition

The patrol coming up with a swinging pace, caught sight of the group

'We are friends,' said the little man, "who were serenading our sweethearts, just by here"

'Have you a permit?'

"Here's the permit," Resca replied

At that moment the hour was striking and in the distance sounded some drunkard's noisy singing, and a shadow staggered zigzag along the line of the lamps

"There's someone singing without permission!" one of the party remarked joking

'Hurry up!' threatened the officer "If not, I'll have you searched!"

The man who wanted the song for his sweetheart stood quietly watching him as he went off with the patrol, then he spat out behind him

Police-man!"

Listen friend," Resca went on, "I don't want to make a noise here, and I've my own reason. But if you like to come under the archway over there, I'm at your service at once"

'No. I've just seen that you're a true man, and that's

enough for me. For myself, you can ask whom you please whether Vanni Mendola knows his duty."

"And in that case, I, Don Giovanni, am ready to sing you the song."

"Many thanks!" said Mendola. "But I don't want the song any longer. It's enough for me to have seen your fine spirit!"

And as each one was going his own way, after many handshakes, and "Good night! Forgive any words in haste . . ." Mendola drew Resca aside and said: "I only wanted to show you . . . What is your name?"

"Giuseppe Resca, at your service," replied the other. "But they call me 'the Fair' as well."

"I wanted to show Concettina, who is now your mistress, and is listening behind the door—I wanted to show her, Don Giuseppe, that men cannot be judged by their riches. . . . And that if I am small in height I have a heart as big as this square. But I see that you're a worthy man, and I don't want any tears in your house or mine over that shameless woman there . . . who, look! is worth no more than this!"

And seizing his old hat he flung it scornfully on the ground and spat on it.

Then all of a sudden the fruit-seller's little window was flung open, and out poured a stream of abuse.

"A lot you're worth! Ugly, stinking dwarf that you are! You make me sick!"

"Let her talk, Don Giuseppe," replied Mendola calmly, holding Resca by the arm, though he was not moving. "Let Concettina talk; she is angry, and no longer remembers that she used not to abuse me like this then, when she made me come here by night when her husband Grosso, good soul, was alive, here, where we are standing now!"

"You? You slanderous liar!"

"Yes, me! And your lover here, now, do you see him? He believes my words more than your swearing."

"Enough!" interrupted Resca. "By the —, enough!"

"You're right; it's time to end it," Mendola said. And without taking any notice of Concettina, who was pouring abuse out at him, he added:

"Good night, Don Giuseppe. Very pleased to have made your acquaintance. And forgive any hasty word."

"Wait, I'm coming with you."

"Oh, I see! I too, in my time, would have got myself killed

for her, if she had told me that now the sun is shining in the sky. But talking won't mend matters. I am at your service, Don Giuseppe. When is it to be?"

"To-morrow."

"Very well, to-morrow. Tell me what time, and where it will suit you."

"Do you know Pizzolato's, the old-clothes shop in the Vico Stretto?"

"Who doesn't? The big shop in the Sole courtyard?"

"Good. The big shop in the Sole courtyard. Be there at midday, and I, Don Giovanni, shall be there too."

Mendola went off his own way, loitering about, and the Fair passed by the widow's shop again. Dark all over. The closed door made him more angry than ever.

He came back the next day, before midday, and found Concettina combing her hair, at the back of the shop—her lovely long hair, all wavy, and she purposely took a whole hour to disentangle it in front of him, without taking her eyes from the mirror.

"What's the matter, Concettina? Doesn't your beautiful hair want to be done to-day?" Resca began at last.

"So this is the way you love me. You go about with people who hate me!" she replied, without even turning round.

"I met that man yesterday by chance, and it wasn't I who made him speak. But I know my duty, and don't need any one to teach it to me. Now I've come to hear if you yourself have anything to tell me, while you are alone in the shop."

"What do you want me to tell you? I don't know that man, and I refute all the lies he has had the courage to invent, by the Sacrament of the Forty Hours in the parish church!"

"Very well," said Resca, getting up from the desk-stool. "Very well, good bye."

Mendola was waiting for him in the Sole courtyard, talking low with Pizzolato, a big fellow without a sign of a beard, who talked like a ventriloquist. They shook hands, and Pizzolato left them to talk together while he ran to give a look to the shop and to prepare the affair.

Vanni Mendola had shaved and put on his new Sunday clothes. By day, got up like this, he seemed smaller and leaner than ever, with a tiny face, and a blinking of the eye which made him appear to be joking all the time, and when he spoke with women he made them feel as if tickled.

"Listen," he said to Resca the Fair. "By the Lord, I am sorry! Sometimes, you know, one word brings another, and there seems no end to it. I should have done better to keep quiet, as you feel so strongly about Concettina. It's not worth the trouble of killing oneself for that woman."

"I know. I've only come to do my duty."

"Women!" concluded Mendola. "What madness to get mixed up with them!"

Pizzolato appeared again at the door, and said he was ready.

"Listen to this, too, Don Giuseppe. If you want to silence her once and for all, and get rid of her, tell her that you know of a certain mark which Mendola left her. That's all."

"Hush!" interrupted Pizzolato. "There's no need to get heated now!"

The shop-boys, busy sorting the rags, slipped out one after another at the sight of a stick their master had seized. While Mendola, Resca the Fair, and two other friends went into the shop, Pizzolato put his head in at the door, and said: "You have everything there," and closed the door.

There followed a few minutes of silence. Then a stamping in the shop, a jumping on the floor, followed by short, dry exclamations. Finally one of the friends peeped out.

"Both of them," he replied to the question in Pizzolato's eyes.

"Mind your own business, you there," the latter threatened, turning to the boys, who were looking up, curious.

Mendola came out first, bent double, with his face more like parchment than before; and after came the Fair, deathly white, supported under his arms by two friends.

"Have you done what was necessary for him?" Pizzolato asked them.

"Yes, sir, to both of them. There's no danger."

"All you go back in there and work," ordered Pizzolato in a shrill voice to the shop-boys. "And, in any case, you have seen nothing!"

At the hospital they wanted to know a number of things about Resca the Fair: who had wounded him, how, and when? Mendola, in order to escape all these troubles, had himself looked after secretly by friends in a dark hovel. But Resca, too, was courageous in his silence, and he lay with his face to the wall, on purpose not to be troubled.

"It was an accident, working for a saddler. I had the awl

in my hand like this      Very well, have me put in prison, but I can't say anything else "

Judge and *carabinieri* had nothing to go on. When Concettina sent her old mother to see how he was, Resca said the same things again, without even turning his head. "I'm well, quite well. It was an accident, not worth talking about. Remember me to your daughter."

Yet he had hardly left the hospital when, still rather weak and pale, he went to see the fruit-seller.

"Oh sainted Christian! You nearly made me die of fright!" she said to him. "How are you now?"

"I'm quite well," he answered, "and I have purposely come now there is no one here, to have a talk between ourselves."

"Good gracious! Are you starting that old talk again? What have they told you against me? Talk clearly."

"And if I speak openly, will you answer me openly?"

"Yes by the Holy Madonna!"

"You've eyes which betray you, Concettina! What have you had to do with Don Giovanni Mendola?"

"What have I had to do with him? Nothing! He used to come and buy nuts and apples. So many people come! The shop is like a seaport. My goodness, Peppino, don't look at me like that! I will make the neighbours tell you if you don't believe me. I'm going to call them."

"No, let the neighbours be. Tell me how things stood between you two. And if you said 'yes' to him, when your husband Grosso was alive, why have you always said 'no' to me, now you are a widow?"

"Oh you've come to insult me, have you? That's what you've come for? Well since you believe that good man so easily, and still suspect me. Well then, I don't want anything more to do with you, not as a husband or anything else."

Let me go!

"No, don't go! Tell me why you've always said 'no' to me who was so fond of you, whilst you said 'yes' to that other?"

"Help! help!"

"No don't scream! You let that other man see that birth-mark of yours, because you loved him. I want to leave you a mark on your face so that every one can see that I was fond of you too!"

He had in the little pocket of his waistcoat a coin thin as a

blade, sharpened at one edge, a little coin of two cents, which he held between his thumb and finger, and which left a mark for life where it touched.

"Help! assassin!" screamed the woman, rushing at him with clutching nails, blinded by the blood which was streaming down her cheek.

Resca the Fair, white as paper, in the middle of the crowd of neighbours, who shook him as they clutched at his chest to hold him, stammered out:

"Now I shall go to prison content."

## THE NEW HOUSE

LUIGI CAPUANA

For some time back the solicitor Barreca's summer walks with Doctor Ballocco had not been as completely silent as for many years past.

Year in, year out every day at the same time, towards five in the afternoon, the solicitor put down his pen, shut up deeds, registers, and notes in the cupboard, took down his top-hat from a nail in the wall picked up from the corner of the outer room where he had left it on his way in, his apple wood walking stick, and descending carefully by the rickety staircase of his solicitorial office stopped on the threshold of the door with the knob of his stick under his chin softly whistling while he waited for his friend Doctor Ballocco. Shortly after, very punctually, the doctor would appear from the Via della Spira very long and very thin walking like a pole which strains to hold itself straight, with right and left shoulder forward in turn, as though in no other way could he put his thin legs in motion. Then the solicitor detached himself from the doorstep and set out, the doctor came to meet him, and side by side, without a greeting without exchanging a single word—the solicitor still whistling softly his favourite tune, the doctor rocking himself on his thin legs—they set out for their walk beyond the walls as though they were two people who walked together by accident without noticing each preoccupied with his own affairs.

Going out by the Porta Vecchia they started on the broad, tree shaded walk with a slow, dignified tread suitable for serious people who were not in a hurry, the solicitor not stopping for an instant his monotonous whistling, the doctor amusing himself by pushing aside with the point of his Indian cane the pebbles and twigs which chanced to lie at his feet, and thus they traversed the whole road, winding round the district as far as the brick furnaces down below the level ground, which seemed a terrace made on purpose for a convenient place to enjoy the view of the wide and charming landscape.

But neither the solicitor nor the doctor bothered to glance at

it; they even turned their backs to it, sitting down on the low wall, the one continuing his soft monotonous whistle—"fichiti-fou! fichiti-fou!"—the other prodding at pebbles and twigs, or drawing lines and flourishes on the dusty ground, till at last they jumped up both at once as though pushed by a spring. And they turned homewards, with grave, slow tread, returning along the same road in the same fashion, passing again under the trees of the great walk, entering again by the Porta Vecchia; and arrived at the place where they had met an hour before, they would separate without exchanging a word, without a nod of salutation; the solicitor to go and shut the windows and doors of his office and to dismiss the writer who waited for him; the doctor to return up the Via della Spira and go and sit in the pharmacy of the Storto, as the chemist was called because he had one leg a little twisted, and limped.

On the very rare wet days the solicitor and Doctor Ballocco were like two souls in torment, with noses to the air under umbrellas against the wall of the solicitor's office. The solicitor came down as though he had not noticed that it was raining, and stood waiting for Doctor Ballocco, who was never long in appearing at the corner, with his umbrella open, walking at his usual pace, as though he had not noticed the rain either. And both stopped by the wall, watching the sky, with black looks at the clouds, shaking their heads at the bad weather, which might have waited at least another hour before coming down in a shower and spoiling their walk!

They never said a word; they understood each other by glances and nods: "The rain is stopping!" "No, it isn't!" "It *is* stopping!" And black looks at the sky, and shoulder-shrugging in indignation at the rain which did not stop, and threatened to soak them. "It's stopping!" "It's not stopping!" "It *is* stopping!" Then, all at once, the solicitor would shut his umbrella and thrust himself in at the door of the office; and Doctor Ballocco would detach himself from the wall and go away, unsteadily, as if the rain had softened his legs. Not a word, not a greeting, as on their walks.

For some time past, however, their walks had not been completely silent. When they came to a certain part of the street one evening the solicitor had stopped to look up at the wall on the right, and after contemplating it in silence for some minutes (the doctor had stopped too, his curiosity awakened by the unusual occurrence), had exclaimed with a sigh:

'There's what I should like!

'What?' asked the doctor

That ruin there, those four crumbling walls, that space!'

What for?'

'To build a house— In mine we are like so many sardines in a tin!

I don't think! with a wife like yours!

And the doctor having spoken these words with all the sharpest sarcasm of an impenitent bachelor, continued his walk without troubling to see if his friend was following him.

He alluded to the extraordinary prolificness of Mrs Barreca, who three times running had presented her husband with girl twins after two other girls born earlier, and when she went out looked like a hen with chickens with those eight girls all in a row from Lisa the eldest a lanky creature of fifteen, to Rosina who was three years old, and as tall as a block of cheese.

The doctor could not forgive his friend for being such a fool as to take a wife when he was over forty.

At the news of the birth of the first twins he had laughed pityingly shaking his head. At the news of the second pair he had leaped up and glared at the poor solicitor, who was scratching his neck in great embarrassment. At the third he first burst out laughing immoderately, then, with contempt in his look, he had shouted

But what the devil! Have you gone mad?

As if it was the poor solicitor's fault.

It certainly had been foolish to take a wife at forty two, and to take such a young one that she might rather have been his daughter. But the girl had a good dowry, moreover, he was alone in the world and his business was going full sail. He had calculated that two or three sons would not be too many, and had flattered himself with the pleasant prospect of having a large family and dying surrounded by people who would have reason to love him. On the contrary! You are too kind, Saint Antony! as they say. Eight girls, and not a single male to prolong the name of Barreca, which would die with him, the last sprout of a long line of lawyers, canons, and solicitors.

He bore a grudge against his wife on this account, and at each new pregnancy of hers became sulky, intractable, at home he also gave vent to his ill humour with that soft whistle, *fichiti-fou! fichiti-fou!* which meant 'Let's see this time. Henceforward he no longer hoped that she would

give up the vice, as he used to call it, of having two girls at each confinement.

Fortunately his business prospered; and a distant relation of his wife's had died, leaving her heir to a good sum.

But in that house, which Rita had brought him as part of her dowry, that crowd of girls could not turn round. The rooms were like hospital wards, with two or three beds each, according to the space. To receive clients who came looking for him early, the solicitor had had to cram a table and two chairs into a little cubby-hole which served as drawing-room and waiting-room.

The house of the Barreca family, which was large and comfortable, had fallen to the elder brother. He had died, leaving one son, who had followed him into the other world the year before. The widow, who had inherited it from him, had quickly married again, and the house had passed, to the great grief of the solicitor, into the hands of a lawyer, his rival in the municipal elections. The latter had, perhaps, married the widow solely to do him a bad turn.

So now they found themselves in that poky house of the dowry: wife, children, and he squashed like so many sardines in a tin, to use his own expression; they felt the lack of air.

The windows of four rooms gave on a yard, littered with rubbish, belonging to a neighbour, who would never have it cleaned.

There was only one balcony looking on the street; and Mrs. Barreca had taken it into her head to crowd it so with pots of basil, parsley, and mint, that the girls could only stand there one at a time; and besides, it was practically the property of the younger children, who had nowhere better to play their little games in the open air.

True, the solicitor was not much in the house, but in the few hours occupied by dinner and supper the perpetual sight before him, and all round him, of the eight girls, who grew visibly, and who in a few years would need a little more light and air to save them from dying of *anæmia*, awoke in him a dull irritation with himself and everything; and at the least thing he would fly into a rage, roar at the girls, box their ears, even insulting his clients if they were not convinced at first sight by the advice he gave them about bringing their affairs to a successful conclusion.

The idea of finding another house to rent or buy had gradually fixed itself in his mind. But it was easier said than done!

Those who had a fine house in that district kept it for themselves they were born there and wished to die there and as for letting it was a case of hovels only fit for peasants.

Build one! There was nothing else for it. Build one on a healthy site spacious and clean. A convent! nothing less than a convent was needed for them all. Build one or rather have the miraculous power of Saint Francis of Paola who by pulling at one end while the carpenter pulled at the other stretched to the right length a beam too short for the church they were building. Ah! Then the solicitor would have put his shoulder to one of the walls of the house and straining hard would have pulled it out as much as was needed to house him there comfortably even with a dozen girls. And following this fancy he had once chanced to lean his shoulder on the wall and plant his feet on the ground and give a pull as though St Francis of Paola had transferred to him his miraculous power.

He had tried here and there this man and that had employed an agent had promised commissions to several people if they found him a house to buy or rent. Nothing doing! At last one had suggested

Why not buy the buildings of the Palazzo Collotta?

The baron doesn't want to sell.

Who says so?

His agent.

He's a knave he says it to annoy you.

Annoy me? What harm have I done him?

I don't know.

But I should have to pull it all down and begin from the foundations.

You have the cash—spend it.

Having got this idea into his head he had written directly to the baron in Palermo and was waiting for an answer. And that is why this time he departed so far from his usual practice as to stop and look up at the wall of the buildings on the right hand side of the street and he repeated the act every evening interrupting his whistling to remark to the great disgust of the doctor

There's what I need!

The doctor shrugged his shoulders without stopping however and struck pebbles and twigs with the point of his stick pushing them angrily as he

"You 'll be doing an even madder thing than when you got married!" he prophesied to his friend one evening.

"What am I to do, then?" said the solicitor crossly.

"Pig out where you are. We are old men. Haven't you noticed it?"

Early in the morning, a month later, behold the hen and chickens coming out of the solicitor's house, and himself behind them. They were going to see the site of the new house, as they already called it.

A ruin. Walls fallen down, or falling; staircases left in the air, floors broken through; and among the masonry weeds and nettles so tall they looked like shrubs. Donna Rita didn't know where to put her feet, and shuddered to see the children let loose under the arches, on the piles of stones and plaster, in danger of breaking their necks. The solicitor exulted, whistling merrily his eternal "*fichiti-fou! fichiti-fou!*" which now meant: "Success at last!" He took no notice of the children, heeded not the screams of the two youngest, who had clutched the nettles and felt their hands smarting as if they had touched red-hot coal. Upright on a big stone block, which stood like a tombstone in the middle of the rubble, he drew fantastic lines with his apple-wood stick, raised stories, divided rooms. Here the sitting-room, there the drawing-room, here the big double-bedroom, there the dining-room; and to the east, on the side towards the street, the row of bedrooms for the girls, one for each; and below on the ground-floor the little garden, flowers and fruit—"miscuit utile dulci." In his joy he spoke Latin to Lisa, who stood beside him and insisted on having a bedroom with an alcove.

"Why with an alcove?"

"I should so like one!"

"We 'll see, we 'll see; but what air, eh? and what sunshine!"

"And what a wind, you should say," interrupted his wife.

"Wind? When it blows it blows everywhere. Don't talk nonsense!"

Mrs. Barreca rarely contradicted her husband. She was a quiet, resigned little woman, who endured as a penance for her sins the birth of three sets of twins, and all those daughters. Fair-haired and pale, always dressed in dark clothes, she attended to the household business, no small matter, and to the children who had to go to school and did their lessons on

the dining room table which was without a cloth for fear of the frequent broken inkpots, she also kept an eye on Lisa the Lanky (the solicitor had given her the nickname, an allusion to her height, and her sisters were always repeating it, knowing that it infuriated her). She kept an eye on her without saying anything to her husband to avoid scenes and tears, she had found in one of her drawers a love letter from a student on holiday and had later intercepted the reply in the hands of the maid who had immediately been sent away.

"What has she done to be sent away?" the solicitor wanted to know.

"That is my business!" Donna Rita had replied. "Have I asked you why you've engaged a new clerk?"

And the solicitor looked at her in amazement at the reply, which seemed to him an extraordinary piece of boldness. He had encouraged in her the habit of having no will of her own, of not asking questions, of not arguing about anything. At home he was a silent despot. "Fichiti fou! fichiti fou!" and that was enough except for the occasions, which were not rare, when he flew into a fury, often about nothing and flung every thing about plates bottles glasses shaking doors and door posts with his cries threatening to thrash mother and daughters! Some neighbour would hurry to the house, the daughters were already shut in their bedrooms, Donna Rita weeping quietly in a corner and the solicitor, with red eyes and purple face, vented his fury on the chairs the dinner table, the doors, giving a blow here and a kick there, till the presence of a stranger brought him to himself.

"Come come! What's all this, Mr Solicitor?"

"Am I not master in my own house? Can't I do what I please? Do I give orders, yes or no? I insist on being obeyed!"

"Yes yes that's all right—but calm yourself!"

He would grumble a bit more, then he stuck his top-hat on his head took his apple-wood stick, and went off whistling.

However from the day on which he concluded the contract to buy the buildings of Baron Collotta—it could not be called a palace because not even the façade was still standing—the solicitor seemed to have changed his nature, wife and daughters hardly knew him to hear him chattering at meals, especially after supper about the future glories of the new house.

He wanted to do things well, to make certain people burst with rage. The money was there ready in fine notes for a hundred

or a thousand, laid aside, accumulated one on another. He need not be beholden to anybody.

And he would take the plan of the house out of a drawer of the writing-table and spread it on the table, pleased when the small children climbed on to his knees to look, and quarrelled about the rooms as if they were ready in every respect and they had to go to sleep there in a quarter of an hour.

Instead it was hardly a week since the workmen had begun to clear the ground of rubble, to pull down crumbling walls, to make heaps of the stones which might serve for the future building. The solicitor passed long hours there among clouds of dust, stirring up the workmen, exhorting the boys, who with osier baskets carried the rubbish to the carts, marking on a note-book the carters' journeys, so as not to be robbed by those rascals. His clerk came from time to time to call him away to a will or a marriage contract or a patent, and the solicitor dragged himself reluctantly away from that rubble, from that masonry, from the space which, cleared little by little, seemed to grow before his eyes. But, pocketing his solicitor's fees, he would smile to think that these too would help to put another stone in the wall. And, at the usual hour, he was always on the threshold of his solicitor's office, with the knob of his apple-wood stick under his chin, softly whistling as he waited for Doctor Ballocco; and setting out with him for their walk, now he would hasten his steps a little till they reached that part of the street in the midst of which in another couple of months the façade of his house was to rise. He no longer stopped, but he turned round to look, and interrupted his whistling to say to the doctor:

"Six windows, and a balcony in the middle."

Or else:

"The kitchen will be on that side."

Or else:

"I've already planted vines in the garden."

Short phrases, indications which continued his mental processes, as though his friend could have seen him think and so understand what he meant.

The doctor shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders. To him "stone disease" was the worst of maladies: you know where you begin but you don't know where you will end. Architects are thieves; they tell you: "You'll spend a thousand, not a penny more nor less!" And when you've spent twenty

thousand you'll scarcely be half way through! Well, if the solicitor wouldn't listen to him, so much the worse for him. The doctor thought all this but didn't say it, or said it in his own way, with the point of his stick, pushing here and there the pebbles, the little bits of paper, the twigs, whatever happened to lie at his feet, vexed that now that walk, formerly so beautifully silent, had changed its character with these interruptions. And he only breathed freely when the solicitor had no longer any excuse for turning round, because the curve of the wall prevented him from seeing the place where once there stood Baron Collotta's palace. And after a little the solicitor would resume his whistling, and the two queer friends would continue their singular walk. The people who met them smiled, stopping to see them pass, to hear the solicitor's "*fichiti foul fichiti foul*" which had become proverbial in the district, and see the doctor, who seemed to have pledged himself to keep the street clear of twigs and stones. Several had already noticed that now the solicitor allowed a word or two to escape him, and the thing seemed truly amazing!

While the builders were excavating the foundations, the solicitor had the garden dug and put in order by one of his peasants. Two peach trees, three Japanese medlars, the vines, already tied to stakes, showed where the pergola would be in another year, then along the unplastered wall which rose straight up from the street, in expectation of the wooden balustrade, a fine row of flower pots, conical or round, of all sizes, some already full of earth, some empty, showed how the daughters employed their spare time. He himself had attended to the peaches, the medlars, the grapes. In imagination he saw them loaded with fruit coloured by the sun—peaches as big as this with red cheeks and beautiful fresh bloom, juicy, rather sour, medlars at the mere thought of which his mouth watered, and black and white grapes hanging in big clusters, to be picked on the spot at dinner time by his own hands. And to enjoy the fresh air in summer, in slippers and shirt sleeves, like a typical daddy, with the children round him! As though the little girls could remain children, and Lisa were not already a young woman.

Naturally it seemed to him that the builders were very slow, and the foundations delayed their appearance on ground level. And he smiled to see the façade rise up little by little, with doorposts which seemed to have sprung from seed, and saw the win-

dow-sills put in place, and then the stonework, and then the frames. Sitting under an old red silk umbrella to protect him from the sun, the solicitor whistled while the masons sang, accompanying themselves with blows of their trowels. He thought about certain people who must be getting green as garlic and choking with gall as they passed along the street, now that from below the house looked complete with the roof and window-frames. "Fichiti-fou! fichiti-fou!"

He seemed another man, always good-tempered, though he saw his bank-notes dwindling from day to day, in spite of the fact that new ones were added every week! They flowed away like water! But that didn't matter if the new house shone fresh as a rose in the sun, with a fine porch on the Via Lunga side, opposite the little church of Saint Cosimo; very convenient, this, for going to mass there on Sundays without too much waste of time.

He was good-tempered, and could not understand why on earth Lisa was always sulking, and had begun to answer her mother rather sharply.

"What's the matter with Lisa?" he asked his wife.

"Nothing."

"She seems nervous and cross."

"Silly girl!"

Donna Rita would certainly never have told him what had happened one morning, when she had caught her daughter talking through the window to her young student. She had seized her by the shoulders and pulled her in; as the student escaped she gave him to understand that she would have had him kicked out by the solicitor; to the maid of the man who owned the courtyard, who was standing laughing at the window, she said she ought to be ashamed of herself to have such dealings without her master knowing: it must have been she who helped the insolent young rascal to get into the yard. And as the maid answered rudely there had been a row.

Lisa continued to sulk; her mother treated her rather roughly. And the solicitor, at his wife's explanation—"Silly girl!"—thought that Lisa would have no more fits of nerves up there in the new house, with all that air and light!

And, to distract her, the morning after he brought the hen and chickens up there. And the damp walls and roof rang with the cheerful shouts of the little girls, who ran through the doorless rooms with plaster floors. But Donna Rita pinched

her daughter, and brought her in from the terrace, because down there in the street was strolling the impudent young man with a cigar in his mouth hands in pockets, and his nose in the air, strolling towards the terrace, impertinent bouncer!

Ah Doctor Ballocco had been a bird of ill-omen!

Yes yes, in the new house they had space and comfort, but that winter the poor solicitor, who was beginning to feel the infirmity of old age, had passed dreadful nights and unpleasant days with the east wind howling and whistling till it seemed to want to tear the house from its foundations. Two or three winters like that and it would be a worse ruin than before. The two peach trees broken down, the medlars stripped of their leaves the pergola flung down in confusion, the flower-pots, most of them rolling on the ground as though someone had played skittles with them during the night, several shattered to atoms. A miracle that the window frames had held out, and that only a few tiles had been carried away like leaves of paper, and thrown on the pavement of Via Lunga!

That morning the poor solicitor wrapped in his old overcoat, with his smoking-cap pulled down over his ears, nearly wept at the sight of so much destruction. The daughters and Donna Rita followed him, straightening the flower pots, lifting up the supports of the pergola, telling each other how frightened they had been in the night, for they who had been born and grown up in that other little house, hemmed in by taller houses which protected it on all sides, had no idea of the strong east wind. There they had slept as though in swaddling clothes, whereas here, the night before, they had been so frightened that they got out of bed, and the solicitor and Donna Rita, who were reciting paternosters and Ave Marias, had seen them come into their bedroom half-dressed barefooted terrified and whimpering. It had taken all the solicitor's severe authority to induce them to go back to their rooms.

Now they were laughing at each other, remembering certain gestures and words drawn from one or another by their terror of the wind. They kept up a merry chatter which annoyed the solicitor. They seemed to be enjoying themselves among all that ruin which gave them so much to do where their father had barely allowed them to set hand or foot, because he wished the garden to be his own especial care. But now the damage

which he had feared from the girls' carelessness had been done a hundred times worse by the wind in a few hours!

And he looked on, roaming about, giving encouragement; only he wondered why Lisa was standing sullen in a corner, and Donna Rita had turned to her and was giving her a whispered scolding.

"But what are you doing to that child?" he asked her.

"Nothing!"

The usual reply. She could not say to him: "Look there at that young rascal playing the fool with her!"

The young student was sitting on the low, strut wall down there, smoking, swinging his legs, looking up, pretending to search in his pocket for a handkerchief to blow his nose, and waving it slightly in greeting, the puppy!

And two years had passed, two disagreeable years. His property had brought in very little, partly because the rains had not come soon enough, partly because the grain had been infected with blight and the olives injured by snow just when they were beginning to flower. Business, too, was slack; taxes absorbed everything; those who had money kept it in their pockets! And then there was the competition of the new solicitor, a young man who gave himself the airs of a Somebody because he had set up an office with handsome furniture, and made his clients wait in an ante-chamber as if he was a minister. And the fools came flocking; they hurried to him and let him pluck them without a murmur, while he threw in their eyes the dust of extreme politeness and ceremony, as though law and procedure consisted of bowing and scraping! Oh, what times! Even solicitors trying to be fashionable! This is what we come to with "One Italy and a hundred loaves"! Enough. He was old now, and without that crowd of daughters he would have shut his office; and those who might want his work would have had to come to the house cap in hand, and beg it of him as a favour.

He passed long hours in the garden, brooding over the Japanese medlars which hung in clusters from the branches, brooding over the grapes on the pergola, swelling in the sun—a hundred, two hundred, three hundred clusters—he didn't succeed in counting them exactly; he would gather them with his own hands in a few months: meanwhile they must be defended with sulphates from mildew, and also from the barbarous taste of the girls, who liked sour things!

Lisa alone was allowed to accompany him down there on special mornings, Lisa who was sensible and serious, and for whom he felt particular affection, seeing her inexplicably opposed to her mother in every little thing.

Finding that Donna Rita would give him no plausible explanation of her strange attitude, he had turned to his daughter, for she too was rather sharp in her replies and behaviour.

'But what on earth is the matter with you both?'

Nothing."

He would make her sit beside him on the low wall, and talk to her about the plants, or the doings of the household, from time to time people he knew would go down the street, and he would start to backbite them, bringing up the past "That fellow's a great thief! That other chap's a usurer! That man's a hypocrite who goes to mass every day and has robbed his brother's wards."

And one morning, seeing the young student down there with his cigar in his mouth and his nose in the air, he said

He takes after his family! poor and proud. His father was an usher at the courts, but he has started making a fuss before the magistrate after losing his job. As for his mother—well, I'll leave her out of it. His elder brother has gone to be a customs officer. This fellow wants to be—not even himself knows what! He pretends to be studying. Instead of the cigar you should buy yourself twopennyworth of bread, you starveling!"

Lisa blushed furiously, hearing him speak thus.

What does it matter to you?" she exclaimed crossly "Everybody should mind their own business."

And she certainly minded hers quietly and secretly, with her head turned and her heart on fire for the young student, and she resisted the continual scoldings of her mother, who threatened to accuse her to the solicitor, as she usually called her husband.

Go and tell him!"

He'll break your head! He'll knock your silly blood out of your brains!"

'Let him!'

"I'll do it myself first!"

'Do it, then!'

Meanwhile Lisa's bad example was corrupting the other sisters who came immediately after her.

Past those windows on the street there was a continual

coming and going of boys. Donna Rita couldn't keep an eye on them all. And the thoughtless little things took turns to help each other.

A friend had warned Donna Rita of the "scandal" which had set all the neighbours talking, and the poor woman was losing her health from the annoyance she always had to swallow. Some day or other, if the thing came to the solicitor's ears, it would be the end of their little world; when the solicitor turned nasty—God help everybody! Especially now that business was going badly and expenses increasing every day. The mere thought of clothes and shoes for all was enough to make one giddy! Donna Rita cursed the new house and the man who had advised her husband to build it. In the other the girls had been a bit restricted, but only as if in a convent. Here with all these windows! . . . If she watched the Via Lunga the girls would make signs on the opposite side. And then this new mischief of knowing how to read and write. In the old days at least there was no fear that beggars who came to the door for alms were bringing love-letters! So she lived in perpetual anxiety; and every time the solicitor came home gloomier than usual she feared to see the dreaded storm burst.

It burst one evening when Donna Rita least expected it.

That day the solicitor had been more cheerful than usual. He had brought the girls down to the garden with baskets and boxes for picking grapes. He climbed up the ladder and held the cluster carefully with one hand while he cut the stem with a pair of scissors, specially sharpened so as not to hurt the vines. First the white grapes, then the black; and the girls had gone up to the house with boxes and baskets on their heads, like so many fruit-girls. Then the solicitor, who had not allowed them to taste as much as a pip, had given a cluster to each, scolding the grumblers who wanted the finest and largest. He wanted to send the largest as a present to Doctor Ballocco; he would tell him about it during their walk.

And it was then (a fine way of thanking him!) that the doctor said to him:

"You fool about childishly with grapes, and all the time there are those who want to rob you of other grapes much more delicious!"

"What? What do you mean?"

"The girls! Haven't you and your wife any eyes?"

"Take care what you say!"

'I'm speaking the truth!'

And as the solicitor, stupefied by the incredible revelation, inadvertently continued his whistling, the doctor, by way of friendship and duty of course, added

'There's the great advantage of the new house!'

And he told him what he knew. Where were his eyes and Donna Rita's?

'Lisa too?' stammered the solicitor

Yes, yes, worse than her sisters, with the son of the usher Canigha!

He named the others too, a whole string! The poor solicitor no longer whistled, the blood had rushed to his head

He reached the house, his eyes bloodshot with anger, with foam at his lips, and having slammed the door behind him he began to deal out blows and insults like a raging lunatic

Ah! I'll give you Canigha's son! I'll give you Bacarella! I'll give you Rumasugha! Flirts! Hussies!

Through all the rooms he followed his daughters, who tried to escape, howling and sobbing. And when he could not hit them he flung chairs and tables in the air, kicked the doors of the rooms where the girls had run to take refuge and shot the bolts. Finding himself face to face with his wife, who was crying and screaming and tearing her hair, he planted himself before her shaking his fists convulsively

And you, Signora Donna Rita, you knew nothing, you noticed nothing!

'I did as much as I could,' cried the wretched woman to excuse herself

It was the worse for her. The solicitor brutally seized her by the neck and perhaps would have half strangled her, if she had not stumbled in trying to get away, and fallen to the ground

'Donna Rita!'

The solicitor, who after all was not an entirely heartless brute gave a shout, and helped her to get up. When he had assured himself that his wife was not hurt, his irritation slightly diminished he began to reproach her

Why did you never say anything?

Jesu Maria! So as not to make you angry?

Good oh, very good! Excellent!

He bowed to her deeply, with twisted mouth, made gestures of ironic approval, started bowing again sarcastically, walking round her with youthful vivacity. Then suddenly he sprang

to close the window-shutters, slamming them to, furiously turning the keys in the locks.

"Like this—all the windows! They shall be nailed too, with nails a foot long!"

And he knocked at the doors of the girls' rooms.

"Open! if you don't, I shall kick down the door. Open!"

A damnable half-day, with the great misfortune that here there were no neighbours who could come and calm the solicitor and take him away. All the windows closed; the girls trembling round the dining-room table, with the lights lit as though it were night, each with her work in her hand, very quiet, with hanging head, under the furious roaming eyes of the solicitor, who at intervals turned to this daughter or that, oftenest to Lisa:

"I'll give you Caniglia's son! That starveling is greedy for the house and the dowry; yes, yes!"

For one, two, even three days it could last all right. With the windows hermetically sealed the house seemed uninhabited and the family stricken with grief. Doctor Ballocco, who had noticed it during their usual walk and when passing down Via Lunga in the course of his usual rounds, said jestingly to the solicitor:

"Are you celebrating religious rites in your house?"

The solicitor grunted. The doctor, guessing what must have happened, added:

"Don't go to extremes. After all—girls——"

Hearing himself thus blamed by the man who had first opened his eyes, the solicitor lost patience, and retorted:

"You stick to killing your patients!"

A reply which made the doctor laugh, though he really had several of his patients on his conscience after so many years of practice.

It was incredible; but the solicitor Barreca had never thought that some day or other those eight girls would have to marry, and be given dowries, if he didn't want to have them on his hands. And yet he agreed with his wife, who said to him timidly:

"We must think about it!"

But how was it to be done? By bringing them to the fair, perhaps, or by putting them up for auction? They must recommend themselves to God, to St. Joseph the Patriarch,

and to St Francis of Paola These sympathetic saints would surely do something for them

And meanwhile he changed his tactics He opened the windows wide and tried to approach his daughters with kind words

Your mother and I will think about it We want your good and we don't want to make you unhappy Here you live like queens what more do you want? A house like a palace! a garden! air and light!

The house was his great pride He also praised the garden to the girls forgetting that if they raised a finger to the peaches medlars and grapes he scolded them as though they had committed a sacrilege

He thought he had succeeded in his intention because he saw Lisa and Rosa and Clementina and Pauline all absorbed in sewing embroidery making stockings when their father was at home because they didn't lift their eyes from their prayer books on Sundays in church now that he accompanied them like a watchdog and the flies who buzzed round them all cleared off at the sight of him except that impertinent Caniglia! He on the contrary went and planted himself boldly beside a pillar with a flower in his buttonhole, and made great eyes at Lisa ignoring the anger of the solicitor who did not know what saved him from breaking his apple wood stick on his head and writhed inwardly so as not to make a scandal It cost him a terrific effort to restrain himself so much that once instead of giving the responses during mass he forgot he was in church and began absent-mindedly to whistle—fichiti fou! fichiti fou!—so that Donna Rita had to pull at his coat tails to remind him that he was in the house of God

Then fell from the clouds the day when Canon Tasca Lisa's confessor after offering him a pinch of excellent snuff with much beating about the bush, all a part of his duty as a priest came to tell him in his solicitorial office

Do God's will! Give them your blessing  
The solicitor stared at him open-eyed unable to say a word

You know Marriages are made in Heaven finished the canon offering him another pinch of snuff

See here Father the solicitor burst out You thank God and the sacred coat you wear Anybody else—  
We won't say any more you are her father I have done

my duty as a confessor—*Benedicite*, and excuse me," replied the canon very stiffly, getting up to go.

The solicitor hurried home.

"Where 's Lisa?"

He was breathless and stammering.

"Oh! my God! what has happened?" cried Donna Rita.

"Nothing. Where 's Lisa? Call her, you!"

And when he called people "you" it meant a storm.

Lisa was just coming out of her room, calm, her head in the air, lankier than usual, she stood up so straight. She stopped after a few steps at the sight of her father, shattering her with his look.

"Ah, you sent me your confessor?"

Lisa nodded. The solicitor was taken aback.

"And you have the effrontery to want my blessing?"

Lisa tossed her head as though to say: "If you care to give it me."

"I curse you!" yelled the solicitor.

Donna Rita put her hand to his mouth.

"No, no, it's a capital sin!"

"I curse her," repeated the solicitor, pushing his wife's hand away, "from head to foot!"

And he advanced with clenched fists on his daughter, who stood there, impassive, white as a sheet, biting her lips. Donna Rita took her by the shoulders and pushed her into her room, scolding her:

"You mad girl! You 'll make your father die of apoplexy."

In fact it was really a miracle that the solicitor did not have an attack the morning that Donna Rita—as though her heart had warned her—got up early and went straight to Lisa's room. She saw the bed made, and not finding her there she hurried through the house, wringing her hands, calling softly, "Lisa! Lisa!" waking the other daughters to help her to look everywhere before the solicitor should understand what was happening. Fortunately the solicitor was asleep and snoring, and Doctor Ballocco, for whom the maid had hastily been sent, arrived in time to give him the sad news. Donna Rita was praying.

"Leave it to me," the doctor reassured her.

"It will be a dreadful blow."

"Leave it to me."

And he went into the solicitor's room. The latter opened his eyes as the door creaked, astonished to see, at that

hour, his friend, who only came to the house for professional purposes

"Who is ill?"

"Nobody. Don't be frightened—these things will happen," the doctor jerked out.

"What things?"

The solicitor coughed and sat up in bed.

"What things? what things? Oh, nothing—Lisa has eloped—there!—with Caniglia's son. As you will have it! There you are! Better for you to hear it suddenly. Eh? eh? Don't be a child!"

The poor solicitor had collapsed, very pale, on his pillows. The blow had been so severe and so unexpected that he felt dazed.

"Splendid!" he said (but his voice trembled). "One less. We shall have more room. Down the wooden ladder? Through the garden? Excellent! I would have opened the hall-door wide if I had known. We shall have more room. Her room shall be closed for good—that daughter is dead! No one is to speak her name here, she is dead for me and for us all, do you understand? Now she is called Caniglia, not Barreca any longer! I cursed her before and I'll do it again. It displeases you?" He turned to his wife, who had made a gesture of horror. "She is dead and buried. . . . What do they expect? that I'll let myself be sorry for them? that I'll give her the dowry? Signor Caniglia has gone wrong in his reckoning! If any one else wants to go off, let them! You, Donna Rosa, with your Bacarella! You, Donna Clementina, with your Rumasughia!

My only daughters are those who respect and love me. Let any one who wants to get out, go! There's the door. Send for a priest, I want to have the house blessed again! There's a curse on it!"

Donna Rita and her daughters were crying quietly, their handkerchiefs to their eyes, as though someone really had died in that new house, which had turned the girls' heads, when they had once been so timid and so well behaved. Donna Rita, too, was angry with the house, and considered it necessary to have it blessed again from attic to cellar.

In a few months the solicitor seemed ten years older, and Donna Rita was worse. Now he would pass long hours in the garden, looking after the pumpkins which he had planted in a corner, and which were doing remarkably well, or at the pergola, where new shoots and tendrils were covering the lattice-work.

so that scarcely a ray of sunshine could get through; at the Japanese medlars, which swelled and hung in clusters from the branches. Donna Rita spent her time telling her beads and praying to the Madonna and all the saints in Heaven to look after her daughters, when she ought to have been looking after them herself and found out that Rosa and Clementina had already begun to flirt more desperately than before.

They seemed to do it as a protest against the cloistered seclusion to which they were condemned. After Lisa's flight it was home or church, church or home; mass every morning; never a walk, never any visits to friends. And the girls found an outlet in making hectic signs from the windows, in going down before daybreak to the garden, to find a letter thrown in from the street with a stone wrapped up in a piece of newspaper, and throwing the answer back in the same way, with wonderful skill.

Rumasuglia argued with Clementina:

"Let's imitate your sister and Caniglia. There's nothing else to be done."

"If you love me, don't speak of that," she replied.

"Let's imitate your sister and Caniglia," repeated her lover.

And since there was nothing else to be done . . . !

It was about eighteen months after Lisa's flight. They were just going to have supper. Donna Rita was seasoning the salad in the kitchen; the solicitor, already seated at table, in shirt-sleeves because of the great heat, was enjoying in anticipation a fine cucumber, still dripping with water from the well where it had been soaking half the day to cool. He was on the point of tasting a slice of it when he pricked up his ears at a subdued whispering in the kitchen, and at the sound of hasty running to and fro from one room to another. Pauline, smallest of all, had come to the dining-room door, looked at her father, and run away. He called out to know what the devil had happened; nobody answered, nobody came. He called again, and louder:

"Clementina! Clementina!"

The first name that entered his head. He was answered by cries and sobs from the kitchen. Then, with the slice of cucumber in his hand, the poor man hurried there.

"What's happened? What's happened?"

The girls had run away. Donna Rita took him by the wrists.

"Solicitor, solicitor!" she stammered, looking in his frightened eyes

The solicitor dropped the slice of cucumber, he had guessed

"Who?" he asked

"Clementina! The wretch, the wretch!"

"It's nothing! Be quiet! It's nothing! She'll die of hunger, like the other one. It's nothing! But I'll prosecute—abduction of a minor! There's the law. Abduction of a minor, I tell you!" he replied, raising his voice as Donna Rita shook her head

"She was twenty-one yesterday"

The solicitor did not know what to say, in disgust

"Let's have supper!" he said suddenly

Donna Rita thought he had gone mad with grief

"It's fate! Let's have supper"

He went out of the kitchen and knocked at the doors of the other daughters' rooms

"Supper, supper"

And they all had to sit down as if nothing had happened, and eat salad and fried fish. But while he distributed the helpings as usual his fork trembled in his hand and clattered on the rim of the dish. Funereal silence. Now and then the daughters would steal a glance at their father, who struggled to swallow

And since he had forgotten to have the house blessed last time, the solicitor thought

There is some evil spirit here! It can't be otherwise"

The house was blessed, vigilance and discipline were increased. But it really was fate, as the solicitor said. Exactly a year after, one fine morning, without as much as by your leave, Rosa quietly crept down the ladder, flung round her shoulders a black silk shawl which her father had given her two days before and went off with Bacarella, the young draper, who had set up shop in Piazza Piccola, also selling cigars and liqueurs. They had seen her cross the road alone. Bacarella, who was waiting for her at the corner, came to meet her, and they both went off to the shop as though they were husband and wife

People laughed, and crowded to the door of the draper's to enjoy the sight.

Bacarella came to the door, and said impudently

"What are you looking at? A Punch and Judy show?"

And he shut the door in their inquisitive faces

This time the solicitor felt as though he had been knocked on the head, when the clerk came running with the bad news to his master's house, where nobody had yet noticed that Rosa was missing; they thought she was in her room, brushing her hair.

Instead, it was Donna Rita who tore her hair at the sight of her husband lying on the ground like a corpse, which she and the clerk could not lift.

Fortunately it was nothing more than a faint.

Eight days later the street porters—Beppe the Chancellor, Slimy the Mechanic, as they were called, and Don Piddu the Palermitan—came and went between the solicitor's new house and his old one, carrying mattresses, little tables, iron trestles, kitchen utensils, furniture of all kinds. The procession had gone on all day, amid the comments of the ill-bred and the sneers of the uncharitable. The solicitor had paid an indemnity to the tenants, who had rented the old house, to go away immediately; but he had said nothing to his wife and daughters, and when the porters came for the removal Donna Rita would not let them in, thinking they were drunk.

"A change from old to new is always a change for the worse," said the solicitor. "Now that we are few we shall have plenty of room here. . . . The other, the house with a curse on it, will be taken by the tax-collector. I said to him: 'For this year the pumpkins in the garden belong to me,' and he agreed."

He forced himself to seem cheerful. While the porters, helped by the girls, were putting the last pieces of furniture in their places, he wandered through the rooms with his hands behind his back, nodding his head in approval, and whistling "Fichiti-fou! fichiti-fou!" But his heart was breaking, especially at the thought of the pumpkins, his one remaining passion, poor fellow!

## THE STORY OF TWO HUNTSMEN

G GIACOSA

In the last years of King Victor Emmanuel's reign, poachers in the Val d'Aosta became so numerous and so troublesome that drastic steps had to be taken against them. So the king decided that the only remedy was to invite the boldest and most successful of these poachers actually to become keepers on his preserves.

The king's passion for Alpine hunting is well known. He was extraordinarily particular about preserving the game, while poachers are notoriously indiscriminate and attack any animal they see without caring what it is. Now the king was very anxious that the fine strain of wild goats should not die out in the Val d'Aosta. As it is, there are only a very few in Europe, in rocky out-of-the-way places in the high Gran Paradiso Mountains.

Tourists however, longed to share the royal hunting, the flesh of wild goats is particularly savoury, and besides, many of the Swiss would have given a good deal to get hold of a male and female of the species, so as to import them into their own mountains and start the breed in Switzerland. So what happened was that a good many of the actual keepers, if they got the opportunity, did a little hunting on their own account. The best time for this was in winter, when they climbed up to the high forests to look for the young goats. Here the keepers took advantage of their authority to further their own interests while of course keeping a sharp look out for poachers punishing them all the more severely because their rival interests clashed. Naturally the poachers could not bear the keepers—partly just because they were keepers, and partly because they encroached on what the poachers considered their privileges. So violent scenes often occurred the shots that rang out in the lonely mountain heights were by no means all aimed at the goats, nor were all the cries uttered by wild animals in pain.

It would happen sometimes in the evening that one of these

mountain-dwellers would come home with his arm or leg roughly bandaged. His wife would clean out the wound with grass, and make the blood congeal with gunpowder or fine tobacco; then he would stay hidden for days, in some damp corner of the cowshed, chewing tobacco and muttering curses, while the cows breathed sleepily around him. People in the village said he had gone down to some fair in Piedmont. Of course every one knew what had really happened, but no one uttered a word about it. Afterwards the wounded man and his aggressor would go off to the public-house together, and each ostentatiously stick up for the other there; and they would certainly come back drunk. But they knew perfectly well that as soon as they were up in the mountains again, it was safest for them to keep out of shooting distance of each other.

When the king died, the hunters had a wonderful time, and there was a general slaughter of goats and chamois.

One day in late spring Gregorio Balmet and Vincenzo Marquettaz, surnamed "Il Rosso," left Cogne to climb the Nouva, an extremely high peak, which joins the Punte di Lavina to the Gran Paradiso beyond, by means of a short line of rocky and almost inaccessible ridges. There is not always snow on the Nouva on the slope reaching down to Val Soana, but towards Cogne all the Gran Paradiso range is encircled by a belt of small, steep glaciers, and under this are snowfields that only melt in the hottest July and August weather. These snowfields keep back the shepherds a good deal; and since they have to go up to the mountains so late and come back so early, the many wild animals there are sure of good and plentiful pasture. The whole chain of mountains sweeps round in a vast amphitheatre, bounded by the Becca di Nona and the Monte Emilius on one side, and on the other by the Grivola, with its fine ridge of ice. From the Grivola to the Becca di Nona stretch, in a gigantic circle of eternal snow and ice, the snowfields of the Lauzon, the Gran Paradiso, the Lavina, the Nouva, and the Tersiva, which furnish life and strength to the mountain pastures and the forests beneath them. Such amphitheatres are not uncommon in the Alps; they generally spread out into a low-horized valley. Here, however, the horizon is bounded by the vast mass of Mont Blanc, just where the two ends of the chain dip into the Val d'Aosta so that, when the Cogne valley is seen from the top of the Nouva it suggests a vast shell of

unbroken rim, deep green at the bottom, higher up, naked black or red rocks, and higher still, the pure dazzling white of snow

In the dim twilight, or on soft, grey days, the Cogne valley is steeped in gentle pastoral quiet. It seems as if all the peace of the world had crept here for refuge. The quiet monotony of colour softens and restrains the outlines, the low houses with their broad overhanging eaves, look like broody hens, and the fresh meadows are as smooth as velvet. The forest sleeps, motionless and still, the rocks bare their great, unbroken surfaces and the snow, in the changing light, lies like a huge downy pillow.

But when the sun shines the landscape takes on a new, tormented violence, for it is so cut into by deep gorges that, even at noon, it is never all in the sun at the same time. The grasslands and shining torrents are broken up by vast shadows, that throw dark silhouettes on the high pine forests, or cast the mantle of winter on the gay summer flowers. Seen from above, the valley looks like some great, gaping mouth, with luminous lips and dark bottomless jaws. And the sun draws up the delicate wisps of vapour like sharp snakes' tongues. The rocks stand out sharp and ragged, and the snows sparkle with a dazzling light.

The two hunters had left the straight path up to the Nouva and bearing to the right, followed the lower edge of the snow field towards the Lavina side. It was a magnificent day, and the mountains were clear and bright, everything seemed to promise them good hunting. They had already seen signs of chamois there were fresh tracks in the snow, so a herd had evidently gone by quite recently, and must have found a refuge near by. They had certainly not gone over the snow field and up the glacier, because in that case the hunters could not have failed to see them, and quite close on the right the flat ground where the tracks had been seen broke off suddenly in a deep ravine, falling sheer to the valley far below. The chamois—and there were a huge number of them, to judge by the tracks—must have hidden down there among a great mass of boulders whose colour merged with theirs. But if once they were surprised, they had no means of escape. Although the ravine was extremely narrow, it was too wide for even the boldest and most fearless animal to jump, and its sides were so smooth and icy that descent was impossible.

The two men walked on in silence, their guns loaded and almost

ready levelled, feeling the tension of the coming shot. Suddenly they stopped short, and a shrill whistle rent the air. The chamois, at least fifteen of them, stood there on the top of the rocks, sniffing the air anxiously. Then four shots rang out, and three of the chamois were hurled down the precipice; the others turned and fled towards the glaciers. There would not even be the bother of taking them down to the valley; the chamois had fallen down by themselves; it really was a lucky day! The hunters ran to the edge of the ravine and looked down, and there at the bottom they saw the three dead bodies lying on the dirty snow brought down by an avalanche.

They were just going to turn back when Balmet suddenly drew his companion's attention to something on the opposite crest of the ravine:

"Look, the keepers!"

There were two of them as well, also armed, and they were standing and looking at the hunters fixedly.

"Well, it's done now," said Rosso. "Let's go back."

Because of the distance, it was quite impossible for the keepers to have recognized them; and the failure to do so was serious in this region of many hunters. The only thing for the hunters to do, so as not to lose their prey, was to get down before the keepers; once they had actually got the chamois, then they could think about hiding them.

Balmet kept an eye on the enemy.

"They've got field-glasses."

"Have they? Here goes, then. . . ."

And without a minute's hesitation, Rosso began loading his gun again, after having shaken his fist in the direction of the keepers.

"Down!" Balmet shouted, and fell down flat on the rock.

A shot rang out from the other side; Rosso let fall his gun. "Christ!" he yelled, and tried to reach his companion; but he rolled over on the ground instead. The keepers had disappeared once they saw their shot had carried.

Balmet rushed towards Rosso. He was alive and conscious; he had managed to sit up after exerting himself violently, and now kept feeling his left arm and leg with his right hand, and shouting: "Swine! swine! swine!" Two big bullets had struck his left arm and left thigh, and both had gone clean through the limb; the flesh of his arm was much mutilated, and some muscle or motor nerve must have been wounded in his leg.

Balmet bared the wound and took up a handful of snow to rub in. Rosso made no objection, although he went on muttering  
Swine! swine! ferociously.

Can you stand, do you think?

Can't possibly.

Well, how are you going to get down, then?

Carry me.

But Balmet was quite incapable of bearing his friend's weight, for the wounded man was a great, tall, stout creature, who would have needed four ordinary men to carry him.

Wait for me then.

You help me move away from here, look, put me over there, and he pointed to a patch of fresh grass close by.

When Rosso was settled there Balmet gave him the brandy flask, a big loaf of bread, and a bit of salt meat. He took off his own old jacket, and put it round Rosso's shoulders, and promised to come back with help as soon as possible. Then he dashed off as quickly as he could go.

It was about one in the afternoon. The sun beat down fiercely, and the air quivered with mist. The snowfield melted into little trickles of water that ran over the dry earth or the smooth surface of the snow, and made a thousand gay little sounds—metallic noises, gentle murmurs like lovers whispering together, angry buzzing like wasps on a window pane. They gurgled and bubbled impudently among the rocks, flowed into one stream, and then happy to meet again after long silence and imprisonment, quickened speed, and finally hurled themselves, in a silvery, foaming cascade, over some precipice where the dry, dark traces of last year's waterfall could still be seen. Here and there, in the hollows where the sun hardly ever came, a weary, languid little stream of water trickled lazily, and intermittently, making a kind of sobbing noise; at the first sound it stopped its dripping, and when the sun came back, began to whimper again like a plaintive child.

Here and there, in the steep open spaces, the black, shining earth could be seen through the snow, now as thin as muslin, and in other places all the snow had vanished and the sun shone bright on the fresh, new grass. Rosso lay there motionless, leaning up against a rock, with his legs stretched out on the grass; anger and pain kept him silent. Now and then he would stretch out his right arm, clutch a little of the snow he could

reach, and put some on his wound; he had managed to stay the bleeding now. He projected his mind across the miles that separated him from the first houses of his village, and calculated how long he would have to wait till his friend could be back again. Now Balmet must be at the fir wood . . . he must have gone by the *Clapey* . . . the ground is terribly slippery there—but then he's as agile as a chamois . . . and so Rosso followed him, step by step, farther and farther down, seeing every place in his imagination, and remembering all the details of the way he had to go. He certainly knew these mountains by heart! Why, he had never realized till now how well he did know them! He wondered who would come and help. So-and-so must be at home; So-and-so (he was the publican, with nothing in particular to do) must be drunk down in Cogné. And then there were the women, of course. . . . But still, one must remember to allow for things; people are busy, after all, and one doesn't find three or four people free at once. And so he began imagining all the obstacles he could, and puzzled his head to discover as many as possible. After all, if there's no one in the first houses, one must be patient; it may mean an hour or two more to wait, but what can that matter? There'll be sun for many hours yet.

He felt an immense tenderness for all his friends and acquaintances down in the valley, a sort of spontaneous childish affection for people he had not spoken to for years. In his silent monologue he called them: "Good old Pietro, good old Stefano," even though they were exactly the same Pietro and Stefano he had threatened with blows only the day before. He went through all his good actions, counting them up carefully and thinking of all the little kindnesses he had ever done to people. There was the time when he had helped someone get his cow out of the flour-bin; and once, just as he was going off hunting, someone had asked him to help him dig away his dam so as to water the fields; and when he was on his way down to the Val d'Aosta, dozens of people had wanted him to do things for them. Why, think of all the times other hunters had asked him to help them get the better of the keepers; and he had never refused. When all was said and done, he wasn't such a bad fellow; and after all, any one else, with his strength, might have been far more conceited and pugnacious than he was.

But then he began looking at the other side of the picture, and got a very disagreeable shock when he remembered all the

ruthless kicks and blows he had dealt at one time or another in his career

Once a husband had found him, Rosso, with his wife in a dark corner of the hayloft—for ten years ago he had been a fine, strapping young man whom no woman would have refused—and the husband had the grace to keep quiet because he happened to know him. How stupid he had been, really, going round like that and posing for such a lady killer! He couldn't see the point of it all, now. Every time he discovered a new fault in himself he suffered an agony far worse than that of his wounds. But, after all, it was rather childish to take it so much to heart. He would have rushed to help any one—just any one, even one of his worst enemies—if he'd known he was in difficulties. How he would have rushed to help! His heart warmed with fervour to do good. He would have braved a thousand dangers to save one of the dwellers in his own valley, for a valley is like a little nation, and every one in it is bound together by a strong family feeling. Then, too, he was a martyr at the hands of the keepers, and every one had a sort of duty of enmity towards the keepers.

All these ideas that came into his head came to stay. It wasn't that he enjoyed them, or even that he spent time considering them as he might have done. No, the ideas just stayed there and hammered on his brain, over and over again, thrusting themselves obstinately at him, and the boring ideas were invariably the most obstinate. Now and then he would close his eyes and pretend to be asleep, then he would open them suddenly and look round him. Still no one had come. He wondered how long he had been up there. The gorges were already in shadow, but the main valley was stretched out lazily in the sun and the water still babbled on in its little chatterbox streams. But the cold wind was beginning to blow up, he could feel it coming and running down the valley like a restless shudder of fever. One forest breathed its coming to another, in the distance the dark pine branches took on a fleeting silvery gleam that left them darker than ever and more still, the dark grasses turned grey for a moment, as they bent before the wind and rose again, prouder than ever, and the wind passed and blew stronger as it rose. Now the pines near by waved their tops, as if to keep away the coming of night, the nearer meadows surged tumultuously. All the sounds and all the voices of the valley seemed to rise all at once in an echoing storm. The

wounded man felt a cold shudder run down his spine, then all fell back into the smiling stillness of before.

But the sign had been given. The powerful swell of sound had brought the grand symphony of day to its close in a mighty crescendo finale; the sun still glowed with beauty, the day was done. The surface of the snow hardened, with little dry crackling sounds, like thousands of tiny springs being released. The gay sound of water was silent, the little streams were still; the soft wet snow hardened to a crystalline brilliance, and the air became as cold and cruel as an enemy.

Now a dull, lurking suspicion had arisen in Rosso's mind. He noticed it at first as an acute feeling of embitterment, but he did not—and could not—explain it to himself, or qualify it, or give it a name. It seemed a temptation more than a real suspicion. As he went over the ground Balmet must have trodden; knocked, in imagination, at the door of every house, and, half timid and half hopeful, considered all the possibilities of help, he had forgotten his own condition, his wounds, and his suffering, and imagined he was really a healthy, eager man going round begging help for a wounded friend. But his mind kept running back, ever more insistently, to the thought of those three chamois they had killed and which lay down there so still on the dirty snow of the avalanche. It was a magnificent bag for one man alone. Three chamois . . . what was there to prevent his hiding them in some cavity in the rock, or under the snow, and then going there stealthily by night with his donkey to fetch them, and keeping all the benefit for himself? The idea, even though he rejected it, made him smile with satisfaction. And when the first icy blast reminded him again cruelly of his own unhappy state, this idea still pursued him and never left him for a moment; but yet somehow it was not *his* idea, it was his friend's. He felt that it must have occurred to his friend; Balmet would have been delighted with it at first, then rejected it, then turned it over in his mind, and finally carried it out. And then the lurking suspicion that he had been abandoned became more and more fixed in his mind; and as he waited, and no help came, his suspicion became certitude. Suddenly he realized he was lost; and despair gave him a sudden prodigious strength. He raised himself on the arm that was not wounded, leaning heavily on his good leg, and dragging himself, in spite of the excruciating pain, to the edge of the ravine; he peered down into the abyss with a grin of terror.

The chamois were still there, motionless on the snow. He felt his spirits revive all of a sudden.

It had all been a ghastly dream. Now he was sure that help would come, and soon. He even imagined he could hear footsteps and voices of approaching people, and he looked round him intently, trembling at the idea of such great joy to come. What a shout he would give when he saw them! He would give life and soul for those brave men. Only a minute now—just one minute—here they are! But how's that? Surely not over there?

He heard the noise of stones being shifted and rolling down in the ravine. He looked down again, two of the chamois had disappeared and there was a man, who must certainly be Balmet, bending over the third just ready to pick it up on his shoulders. Rosso could not recognize him properly because of the distance and the shadows, but it couldn't be any one else but Balmet. Yet when Rosso gave out a great roaring shout, the man just raised his head, looked up, and then went off hurriedly with his booty.

The shadows had fallen, all the valley was dark, the sun was fading from the fields and the forests, and touched the surrounding glaciers with a delicate rose flush and deep blue reflections. Then even the glaciers paled, the rays struck the highest peaks and grew fainter and fainter till the light seemed only to linger lovingly on Mont Blanc in the distance. For a brief moment the snowy peaks were darker than the sky, but then even this assumed an ashen tinge, and the snow stood out, clearer and more luminous. And then the stars shone out in the calm sky, the Milky Way was brighter than all things, and the valley seemed shrunken, blotted out in darkness.

The great Cogne hollow was as silent and dark as a tomb.

The wounded man began to whimper like a child, then he turned furious and shrieked like a lost soul. He shouted and cursed and prayed, he uttered nameless sounds, raged, and relapsed into exhausted silence, only to begin again more loudly than ever, till echo returned his screams in human shouts, and the shouts in long wails, and the wails in weary, sinking moans, and then the voice died away. So he looked fixedly into the darkness beneath him, silent and stupefied.

He was still alive in the morning. A vague hope came back with daylight and, above all, an extraordinary clearness of mind. It seemed hopeless expecting Balmet to come back, but very

likely the keepers, once they knew what had happened, might have gone down to denounce him, so that the authorities would surely come back and look for him. He must keep himself going through this long wait; so he dragged himself back to the place where Balmet had put him the evening before, and where he had left the small amount of food he had. But it was a long and painful effort.

After eating the salt meat listlessly, and drinking some brandy, he felt better. His wounds were not bleeding, but burned and swelled; his thigh, particularly, was so swollen that the skin felt as if it must burst. He could feel all his nerves stretch and stiffen, and then relax again like shattered cords. He felt terribly restless, as if he must get up and move about and do something; but he was so weighed down by exhaustion that he could not move. The morning was calm, with a burning midday sun. The warmth of the sun revived him; he felt much less lonely now in the midst of this gaiety of life and sound. But hours and hours went by, and still no one came. A herd of chamois came down quietly from the glacier and frolicked in the snow. Some of the boldest came up to him, sniffed him as if they wondered what this dark object could be; and then, encouraged by his stillness, came up till they almost touched him. Then he made a gesture with his sound arm and put them to flight. They might be the same ones who had escaped the day before.

Little by little a vague feeling of tiredness spread over all his body. He did not suffer now except from thirst, which brandy does not quench effectively. He had collected all the snow he could actually reach; now nothing on earth could persuade him to make any movement that might be uncomfortable. He picked up a little stone and put it in his mouth to bring the saliva, and went on looking straight ahead, up in the air and down in the valley, where the green of the pasture lands rested his tired eyes. He had no more hopes, or complaints, or thoughts to worry him. He felt completely and deliciously lazy, and if any one had come just then to take him away, he would have besought them to leave him lying there quiet.

Towards sunset a few light clouds appeared in the direction of the Gran Paradiso. A little later, other clouds rose up from the peaks on every side; they grew bigger and bigger, clinging to the mountains, trailing along with slow, voluptuous movements, and breaking up in the forests. More of them emerged

cautiously from the valleys, hesitated a moment as if afraid of being discovered, and then rushed to join the great grey torrents of cloud that were flooding and darkening the sky. In the ravine thin wisps of vapour rose rapidly, as if sucked up by some huge open mouth in the sky. Little by little the valley became enclosed by, as it were, a great lid of cloud, but in the distance over Mont Blanc, the sky smiled, happy and serene streaked blue and rose and violet and flaming gold.

Rosso stared with a wild intensity at that luminous patch of sky. He felt as if that battle of clouds was being waged to his defeat, the clouds were his enemies, who sought to surround and suffocate him. But Mont Blanc was watching over his safety, it told him to trust and not to move, assuring him it was there, and could clear the sky at will, and make it as bright as a mirror again. The battle was fierce and long. The clouds fell one over the other, gathering and scattering fleeing and returning in wild convulsive motion, now streaking the sky with fine white lines, now blotting it out in huge grey, leaden masses. Rosso's thirst grew burning and unbearable, but he could not move, he was absorbed in the radiant glory of the mountains.

The *Cogne chu ch* bells rang for the Ave Maria, the clouds won the battle, Mont Blanc was covered, and Rosso shut his eyes dead.

The clouds came down so low that they almost touched him. In the valley it was raining hard and up there on the heights of the *Nouva* a wild battle of angry snow began falling first in fine crystals and then in great heavy flakes falling silently.

The women in the mountain villages flocked to church whispering to each other stories of spirits that had come the night before and filled the valley with shrieks and lamentations.

# THE SPAZZOLETTI COUPLE

E. DE MARCHI

## I

"GALLARATE, Parabiago, Musocco, Milan . . . next stop Varese!"

The engine snorts like an angry beast; the porters slam the doors to, and the guard blows his whistle.

"Quick, in here!"

"Second class, third class——"

"Get in, quick!"

"Margherita!"

"Here!"

Dlen—dlen—dlen!

"We 're off!"

Puff—puff—puff——and the train starts.

"You 're always like that, you know. You 're always such an age arranging your beautiful hat, and your beautiful scarf, and your beautiful little curls; it 's simply ghastly; and then we have to hurry and scramble not to miss the train."

"Are you talking to me? Well, I stopped to do the——"

"Do, do, do! If you only did what I told you to, and didn't go round chattering to every one you meet; chatter, chatter, chatter——!"

"Me? Oh, my dear husband, you 're as beautiful as the sun!"

"And you 're just like the moon——" And meanwhile the Cavaliere Spazzoletti started putting down his suitcase and umbrella and hatbox, and all the paraphernalia of people on their way back from the country. It was towards the end of September, and late in the day, but the weather was still very warm, and Spazzoletti felt the heat dreadfully, for he was in a great hurry and a bad temper as well.

"It isn't as if you only thought you were clever," he went on grumbling.

"Do shut up; there 's absolutely no point in arguing." And his wife flared up, getting scarlet and furious.

"If I talk, it's because I choose to——"

'Of course parrots talk too

Spazzoletti frowned darkly, but there were other people in the compartment, and it didn't do to lose one's dignity in public. So he gave his wife a withering glance, wiped the perspiration from his cheeks and brow, and finally retired into the corner seat near the door to swallow the insult. Margherita sat opposite him, looking out of the window, the sun, setting low behind a line of poplars, flashed its golden rays and struck her face with a violent, blood red light, and her eyes sparkled like fire.

The train, which had been late, picked up speed like an English express.

The Spazzolettis had married two or three years ago—a real love match. She was a neat little woman of nearly twenty-four, delicate and refined, with her small, straight nose and thin lips like pale coral, that almost disappeared whenever she got particularly excited. She affected a trim and elegant style of dress, that set off her aristocratic slowness, and the rather superior and reserved manner which is considered suitable for the wife of a cavaliere.

If the old saying is true, that a man is as old as he looks, then the Cavaliere Spazzoletti was not yet thirty-three or four. He was a fine-looking man, getting slightly bald, but that is not unattractive in an intelligent man. He was actually manager of a large artificial manure concern, but he looked like a diplomat and behaved like an ambassador. But managing a business is not merely a question of looks, like being an ambassador, and Spazzoletti had plenty of sense and *savoir faire*, and his shareholders trusted him implicitly. The famous Hermann (and it is always good to know what a German thinks about these things) had often mentioned Spazzoletti in agricultural magazines as one of the most intelligent and enterprising of Italian business men, and now this "muthige, praktische, verstandige Mann" had actually been compared in public to a parrot.

Matters had not been going very smoothly in the Spazzoletti household for some time, but it was difficult to tell whose fault it was or what the quarrel was about. Perhaps they had just got tired of each other, as one gets tired of having the same dish for dinner every day, or perhaps (which is far more probable) it was because they had no children, and each secretly thought it was the other's fault, but whatever it was (it is always difficult

to see clearly in such matters), the fact remains that their love had lately turned sour, like good wine when the weather changes. It hadn't turned into vinegar yet, but still it was decidedly sharp.

And nothing could have been more ghastly than that appalling stay at Varese. It poured with rain for a fortnight on end, and one couldn't put one's head out of doors; and when it was fine, their chief amusement, since they had no friends in the place, was going up and down the Sacred Mount on donkeys. All those donkeys and donkey-drivers (there is nothing in the world so exasperating as a donkey-driver) had so tormented the poor cavaliere on his walks that he couldn't get rid of the thought of them even now. He had had to pay and pay and pay for those donkey-rides, and argue with those scoundrels; and what had been the result of it all? The only result he could see was that his wife went about with an eternally discontented face, getting horribly bored with donkeys and Sacred Mounts and everything. As a matter of fact she had chosen Varese herself because she wanted to go on some sort of pilgrimage to the sanctuary there, and he had followed her there quite meekly, pretending to believe in the efficacy of her remedies; but after a bit he was really delighted at the prospect of getting back to Milan again. On the way back, they had arranged to spend the night at Parabiago with one of Spazzoletti's old school friends, who had not yet had the pleasure of making Spazzoletti's wife's acquaintance. This friend had invited them so persistently in his letters that it would have seemed positively rude to refuse. And then Spazzoletti's wife was such a little peach that Caldara longed to see her, just as Spazzoletti longed to show her off.

Meanwhile Margherita was thinking what sort of a time she would spend in Milan in October, in a suburban house near the factory. And then she thought of the smells . . . and the view over the cemetery too, while all her friends were still enjoying themselves in the Lakes. Generally all these arguments were taken for granted, like hot coals underneath the ashes; but woe to whoever disturbs them! And so this couple, who, in fact, saw far too much of each other, made mountains of molehills and rivers of streams.

On the other side of the carriage, near the right-hand door, the Ballanzinis were sitting opposite one another. They were from Musocco, comfortably off, somewhere between fifty and sixty; and while the new-comers had been arguing, the Ballanzinis had exchanged several knowing glances. They were

dressed anyhow in the sort of good solid clothes that don't care what they look like. For Claudio Ballanzini was a follower of that ancient school of thought which holds that two bottles of good wine do a man more good than one bottle of bad. His wife shared his views but expressed them rather more discreetly, she used to say: Who spends most spends least. But plenty did no harm to either of them and as they sat in their respective places they could comfort themselves with the thought that the railway company couldn't be making much profit out of carrying them.

But the signora although she had no more illusions about her appearance still persisted in decking herself out with bright ribbons or poppies in her hat or a magnificent display of gold jewellery which she hung all over herself till she looked as yellow as a carrot. She liked to make her husband look as much of a good Milanese as possible she made him wear a great loose Carlambrogio cloak and tone down his blatancy with a ghastly old hat exactly the colour of a donkey's skin and which made him look just like a mushroom. But in spite of all this it looked as if that villainess Youth still kept up her flirtation with him and freshened his cheeks every morning old rascal that he was. He was handsome and fresh as a new loaf with his sharp roguish grey eyes and he was the despair of Signora Ballanzini. Not that he ever dared to rebel or to run after the young women of the neighbourhood—oh no! It was only that suspicion is the daughter of jealousy and jealousy is an ill for which there is no known remedy. Luckily he had a sweet and gentle nature. His desires and ambitions and fancies were limited he recognized that his wife was a truly superior woman. But the knowledge of this fact did not save him from being constantly reminded of it by his wife saying that she had brought the house and land in Musocco as her dowry and if she hadn't picked him up in the street like an old shoe he would have died as he was born cook in the Rusca household.

She expressed the same idea in another way when she declared that if she hadn't rescued him he would have died in the saucepan where he was born.

The glance she gave her husband when the Spazzolettis came in quite obviously meant: You see what happens when a man has an unreasonable wife? And when the cavaliere got called parrot then Signor Claudio must have exclaimed to himself: Take heart! You see there are others too!

The Ballanzini couple had just been spending the day with her brother, who was curate in a village near Varese. This was an excursion which happened regularly every year, and always included a magnificent dinner to which the curate applied himself wholeheartedly, for he knew that intelligent people must be intelligently fed. He almost always provided the usual big hare and the usual pig's trotters from Modena. Then there were rice pie, ices, dates, and figs and cream; cognac after the coffee; a good cigar after the cognac, and finally a glass of maraschino, sweet as angels' tears. The Ballanzini's left the Lord's house broader than they were long, and stuffed full enough to last them a week, while the curate's poor old grey, which had to drag them to the station afterwards, stretched out its long neck pulling till it looked for all the world like a giraffe.

Once they were well settled in the railway carriage (*pacem habete*!) they used to go to sleep like two babes in the manger. And this, by the way, seems the right moment to tell what happened to them just a year ago under the same circumstances. As soon as the train started, they both closed their eyes, and slept so soundly that they went right past Musocco without noticing. They finally got as far as Milan without hearing the train whistle, or the guard shout, or anything. They were shut up there in their second-class compartment; and when the carriage was shunted into a field, they were left there to slumber peacefully alone. It may have been that really no one noticed them, or that someone was trying to play a practical joke; but anyhow, that was what happened, and it was only towards eleven that night that the terrific whistle of a train going past woke them up with a start. They yawned, looked round, wondered, and then realized where they were, and finally looked outside. Utter darkness; the place deserted; and the train standing still. "What can have happened? Where on earth are we? Good heavens! what's the time?" Signora Ballanzini screamed and fainted. People came rushing up with lanterns, the stationmaster was told about it, and finally the police were summoned.

Just think of the noise and laughter and confusion that must have followed! Four men carried the Signora Ballanzini into the station buffet. There they loosened her clothing and dashed vinegar in her face; but when Signor Claudio wanted to give something to the kind people who had been so very helpful, then—*itibus*—he found his pocket-book had disappeared.

This had happened the year before, but the Ballanzinis will remember it to the end of their days. Whenever the subject is mentioned the poor signora feels quite faint and thinks her last moment has come, one day, she would like to ask a poet to make a sonnet up for her about it.

So now when they were actually in the train under exactly the same circumstances you can imagine how vividly their adventure came back to them. Obviously a rat will not be so silly as to fall twice into the same trap, but all the same, it was quite impossible to expect that Signor Claudio shouldn't go to sleep—as bad as suggesting he should fly. So his wife made herself responsible for waking him up in time. As for her, unless the devil had made a special vow to betray her, there was no danger of her falling asleep.

A quarter of an hour later, her husband was fast asleep under the great flaps of his hat dreaming he was busy pressing grapes in a bucket.

Darkness had fallen meanwhile. A feeble, smoky little lamp behind a sort of dull glass globe, gave just enough light to see to go to sleep by. The monotonous voice of the wheels, the motion of the train the swaying lullaby of the carriages, and all the fumes and warmth of the strong wine and *vassolis* she had drunk kept threatening to ensnare Signora Ballanzini herself in the subtle invisible nets of sleep, but the fear of being caught in the act watched over her like a watchdog. Now and then sleep and fear began squabbling in her mind like cats and dogs in the dark under the stairs, and that gave her such a start that it thoroughly woke her up. Then she looked out of the window, and shook off her drowsiness, till sleep, which really was stronger than she came back again to cast its nets around her.

Someone who did not go to sleep, however, was the Cavaliere Leopoldo Spazzoletti, and all because of the above-mentioned 'parrot'. He felt it fluttering about in his stomach like a real live bird. Have you ever felt how appalling it is to be insulted by a woman whom you had always considered perfectly docile and obedient? Of course every one has his own particular pride and sharpens the blades of his grievances on it. In thirty three or thirty four years no one had ever dared to be anything but perfectly polite to the Cavaliere Spazzoletti: he had seen great, tall men like giants tremble and turn pale before him—why, he could see them now, factory hands, as strong as

bulls, who can lift a hundredweight in one hand just as easily as you or I could lift a chair cushion.

The general opinion was that the Cavaliere Spazzoletti was an extraordinarily energetic man, just in all his dealings, intolerant of excess, and able to face a crowd of drunken workers and mechanics on strike quite alone, as if they were just a collection of rowdy schoolboys. Was this the man to put up with the stinging sarcasm of a saucy wife? Obviously if he felt a bitter taste in his mouth, he wasn't entirely to blame. Why should he stand things from his wife which he would never have forgiven even his oldest friend for saying? And why, after all, shouldn't he dominate his Dresden-shepherdess wife?

After thinking all this, he swore within himself not to open his mouth till Margherita had come of her own accord to beg his pardon—which he wasn't going to vouchsafe her unless she really deserved it. Once he had sworn this solemn oath, he was as implacable as if his mouth had been sewn up with wire.

As for Margherita, she pretended to be asleep; with her head against the back of the seat and her arms crossed like some conquering hero dictating the terms of treaty. She too had plenty of arguments, just as important and convincing as her husband's; and she repeated them over and over again as if she had to recite them all aloud in a few minutes. Leopoldo, she considered, had not always been so disagreeable and inconsiderate as he had been lately. The first few months of their married life he had been full of caresses and endearing little words, and all sorts of romantic promises about dear little houses, and nests, and paradise. He had been so handsome then, and so considerate and courtly, as gentle as a child and as affectionate as a pet dog. According to what he had said then, he would have spent the whole day at her feet, content to do nothing but gaze into her eyes, where he said he could see the sky and the sea and beyond. According to what he had said then, no one had lovelier eyes, or softer hair, or hands more like alabaster than she had; and he swore he would like to put her dear little feet under a glass globe to protect them from the dust. And it was all nothing but fine talk! When they get hold of you—and Margherita's mind went on working like a windmill—when they get hold of you, these men, these gentlemen, so they call themselves, behave just like big babies who want to see what dolls are like inside. And then they go and tell you you are just rag dolls, or papier mâché, or whatever it

is and then they get bored with their little games. They actually tell you so, but they start yawning, and sink into an arm-chair with their slippers on, and cross their legs, and smoke a cigar, or even a pipe, maybe, and they find colouring their blessed pipe far more interesting than fondling a doll.

Suddenly—so the little windmill went on—European politics become extremely complicated, the country is in danger, trade is bad, Bismarck and Russia are beginning to glare at each other. So then, of course, a man has to read two or three papers as big as sheets, and rush to the Stock Exchange, or to a meeting of shareholders at the Chamber of Commerce. And what about the poor wife all this time? He, of course, had his dinner at a restaurant, and there was garlic in the stew. Garlic always disagreed with him—but never mind, he'd get over it. Anyhow, he never seemed to have a moment now to talk to her, or to take her to have a sherbet in the public gardens, or to go with her to mass in the cathedral, even for five minutes, although it was his clear duty and she had every right to demand it.

Politics, and the Stock Exchange, and business—the little windmill went on turning—and manure, and toothache, and selfishness—selfishness, that's the key to the whole situation! And do you know why? People who think they are being clever inevitably say *Cherchez la femme*. But there, my dears, is the difficulty. That's all wrong. First of all you must look for the doll. And dolls are women who don't know how to change their eyes and their hair every day, but would rather stay just as nature has made them.

And other thoughts began to mingle with the original ones. She wasn't born to be a servant or a nun. Her mother had Doge's blood in her veins, and her father had been a Cabinet Minister. Blood has its rights, whatever one may say. A husband should never let himself be worse than other men, if he didn't want to come off badly in comparisons. When a woman does get started off making comparisons, then it's just like when there is butter on the ground, and the bolder and bigger you are, the more you slip on it. In this world, there's always bound to be some man who would like you better than your husband does, and then, either you must be as cold as marble, or else

Just at this point, when Signora Margherita Spazzoletti was thinking these things out confusedly in the dark, Signor Claudio felt something touch his arm. As he was only sleeping in

snatches, he shook himself, opened his eyes, and realized that his neighbour on the left (the parrot one) was asking him to let him sit near the right-hand door, as he had to get out at the next station, Parabiago, and had a good many things to take out with him.

"Of course," said Signor Claudio politely, getting up and giving the cavaliere his place. The lamp was at its last gasp and was flickering vaguely, as if it were afraid of going out completely. Moreover, this changing places was done so discreetly that Signora Ballanzini, who may have been having a little snooze just then as a rest from her worries, never noticed it. And Signora Spazzoletti, who was sitting there in the corner with her eyes shut, feeling very angry, and thinking that either one must be as cold as marble, or else one must try and become so, noticed it even less. You may always assume that a woman is virtuous, but you can't always assume she will be constantly parading her virtue. There are truths one must not ever try to prove, if one wants to believe in them; and woe to the woman whom you, O husbands, force to become more chaste than she really is!

It would take too long to write down all the things Margherita thought as the train moved towards Parabiago. She wasn't interested in the journey any more—only in the definite ultimatum she meant to deliver to her husband as soon as they got back to Milan. Either like this . . . or like this . . . or perhaps, if it wasn't like that . . .

"Margherita!"

Suddenly she realized someone was calling her. She started, opened her eyes, and before she had time to collect her thoughts, she saw her neighbour (the one with poppies) spring up like a trap when you open it, rush to the door, and get out hurriedly, shouting: "Wait for me, Claudio!"

The man who had been sitting opposite near the door had already got out. It was all over in a moment. The porters, anxious to keep the train up to time, slammed the doors hastily; the engine whistled and was off like the wind.

Margherita gave a quick glance at her husband, who was sleeping—or pretending to be asleep—in his little dark corner. Well, it was his fault after all if things didn't go properly! Not all the wealth in the world would have persuaded her to start a conversation. For silence means no breath wasted, and time saved as well.

## II

The countryside lay bathed in the trembling milky light of the moon, now almost full, here and there it lit up hills and hollows and gave an added mystery to the places still in darkness. A few tiny clouds, driven along by the force of the wind, drifted in the clear expanses of the sky. By contrast with the moon the stars seemed pale and lacking in lustre. In short it was the sort of night one might go on describing for ever and ever. Margherita let her mind lose itself in the infinite space of gentle and voluptuous moonlight, and the same torpor that might overwhelm some young girl bathing her limbs in warm milk. She too had dreamed that the garden of her life might be illuminated by eternal moonlight, and now, when she explored what might be called the forest of her secret desires, she could hear sounds of tender voices mingling with the rustle of dry leaves fallen before their time.

She was not born to waste herself, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute in assembling all the parts of a life as mechanical as clockwork. What she wanted was to be loved a lot, and petted a lot, and flattered a lot. And she thoroughly deserved it.

Gradually her eyes, fixed on the moon, began to fill with tears. After all since now they were alone in the compartment, what harm was there in trying to make peace again? Men are often like great heavy boulders that can really be moved with a finger if only you know the knack, the worst possible thing is just to hurt obstinately into them.

Margherita gradually gave way to these gentler and more humane ideas vanquished her last obstinate objections, her pride and her final scruples, got up, went and sat on the other seat, put out her hand towards the man who was pretending to be asleep with his mouth sewn up with wire, took his hands. Good gracious!

Margherita shrieked and leaped to her feet.

"Whatever's the matter?"

"Leopoldo!" she screamed, rushing to the window.

Signor Claudio (for he was the sleeping man) started, leaped up too and saw, not his wife, as he had expected, but another woman who was weeping and tearing her hair. And the train went on like the wind.

To understand what all the muddle was really about, we must go back as far as Parabiago, where Signora Ballanzini was lying in a dead faint on the stationmaster's sofa. Beside her stands the Cavaliere Spazzoletti; his eyes are starting out of his head with surprise; he is pale and agitated, and doesn't know whether he is on his head or his feet.

This is what had happened: After having changed places with his neighbour, without having warned his wife (because that "parrot" rankled), Spazzoletti got out at Parabiago, merely calling, "Margherita," in the driest and rudest of voices. But Signora Ballanzini was called Margherita too (if I haven't mentioned it, I mention it now). When she heard her name being called, she roused herself from the mischievous little sleep that had seized her all of a sudden, then, when she saw the man opposite her was no longer there, she was terrified lest what had happened the other time should happen again now. So without really thinking what she was doing, she jumped out after him. Rats do not fall twice into the same trap. Signora Spazzoletti saw that all her neighbours were going away, and went on dreaming to the moon.

The scene which ensued, under the station lamp at Parabiago, can be imagined but not described. Signora Ballanzini, all in a flurry, began rushing after the man she supposed to be her husband, who was going off in the darkness towards the gate; but when she reached him and found it wasn't her Claudio after all, she stopped, and went back to look for him. But no one else had got out of the train there at all.

"Stop! stop!" she began yelling after the train that was fast disappearing into the night.

"Stop! stop!" the Cavaliere Spazzoletti screamed, waving his umbrella.

But who can stop a train?

The two unfortunates stared at each other, completely mystified. She began screaming like a young eagle, and he began to swear. He wondered whether there were any other trains for Milan that night; but there were none till seven o'clock next morning.

"Damn it!" the Cavaliere Spazzoletti screamed, absolutely beside himself, rushing up and down with his hatbox in his hand and his umbrella under his arm. Margherita had nothing with her—not her railway ticket, nor the keys of her house, no money, no anything. As he thought of these things, Spazzoletti was

plunged in the deepest despair. He turned and went in search of the old lady that Fate had given him instead of his wife, he found that she had stopped talking, and was just lying on the sofa, moaning and sighing the while.

When Signora Ballanzini came round again, after a great consumption of aromatic vinegar, the cavaliere began questioning her and scolding her quite rudely. In fact, he let loose at her all his anger and indignation. Although it was late in the evening, a whole crowd of people who had heard about his adventure came out of the public-houses and flocked to the station to see the fun. Among others, there was Caldara, who had been waiting there with his carriage to take the Spazzoletti to his house at the other end of the village. But Spazzoletti noticed nothing and recognized no one. He was thinking of his wife. His poor wife at the mercy of another man! Poor Margherita! When he thought how terrified she must have been when she found herself all alone and abandoned, when he thought of the interpretation people might put on the story after hearing their angry words in the train, anger and jealousy and pity welled up within him, and he ran wildly down the railway line in the moonlight for fifty yards or so. But he soon saw how unreasonable it was to tear after the train like that, so he came back to the station, which seemed such a very important spot in the geography of his life that night. He had many thoughts but the bitterest of all was the lurking suspicion that Margherita had done it on purpose just to give him a lesson.

This was agony to Spazzoletti, but to Signora Ballanzini when she came round, the idea that her Claudio was travelling all by himself with that beautiful woman, and would have gone as far as Musocco with her, and then (pity and necessity and politeness dictating it) would have asked her to his house to spend the night, and then and then and then the idea filled her with absolute terror. When she could manage to stand up again, she insisted on having a carriage called for her, but no one moved. People explained to her that no one could possibly be found to drive her at that hour of the night, and assured her that the roads were very bad indeed and beset with danger, and it really wasn't worth while, just for the sake of saving an hour or two, risking such an impossible journey by night, when the train from Arona would go by so early in the morning. So, in spite of what she wanted, she had to do what people told her. She and Spazzoletti stared at each other

again. The moon seemed to be laughing at them too—stupid, placid moon, with its great, roaring mouth. To left and to right of them, the railway stretched shining and deserted, into a distance fraught with shadow and mystery. The world was wrapped in silence and solitude. They both felt their eyes fill with tears, and a lump rise in their throats and seem to throttle them.

Caldara, when he saw no one had come, went into the station to look for his guests. When he had laughed at their adventure, he politely invited the lady to come and stay the night in his house as well, particularly as the Ballanzinis of Musocco were well known in Parabiago.

They were just moving towards the carriage when the station-master shouted:

"There's a telegram just coming through from Musocco."

It was just as if a gun had gone off. The Cavaliere Spazzoletti and Signora Ballanzini rushed up so anxiously and indiscreetly that the stationmaster had great difficulty in persuading them not to touch the receiver, but to sit still and wait in silence instead.

"The telegraph isn't a bell, you know," the stationmaster muttered rather sulkily.

So they sat down and waited patiently. The point of the needle began punching holes in the moving strip of paper with a nervous, fitful motion, like the pulse of the two unfortunates waiting there. The room was lit by a lamp standing on the telegraph table, the shade arranged so that the walls and ceiling were in shadow. And the only noise beside the tick-tick of the telegraph receiver was the slow and solemn tick-tock of a grandfather clock in a corner behind the cupboard.

When at last the needle had finished writing, the stationmaster took his spectacles out of their case, put them just on the end of his nose so that they looked like the trade mark of good wine; then he frowned, till his thick white eyebrows and stiff moustache stuck out like little bundles of hay; and finally he came close up to the lamp. And naturally the two travellers came close up beside him.

"Can't yer stay where yer are, dama yer?" the poor man shouted, completely losing his temper. "And yer couldn't make 'ead or tail on it either, if yer did look. Now, wot this 'ere says, is: 'Musocco line clear send wine.'"

I do believe the two bereaved ones would have stayed staring

at each other for a hundred years, if the stationmaster hadn't added

'Well, that's that This 'ere's meant for me, seein' as 'ow I've got a lot of wine waitin' to be sent off, but jest you listen, now

And lo and behold, the bell announced that a second urgent telegram from Musocco was on its way And this one read "Changed wives sleeping Musocco come first train."

It would take much too long attempting to describe all the various emotions that these words aroused in the heart of the Cavaliere Spazzoletti and his fair companion, and still longer to describe the magnificent reception Caldara's wife and sister gave Signora Ballanzini and her poppies I must be content with saying that the Caldaras had prepared tea, and cakes and white wine to greet Spazzoletti and his wife, as well as a room, especially whitewashed for the occasion, with a magnificent goose feather bed But not one of them was able to sleep a wink all night There was laughter and there were tears—and tears from too much laughing Spazzoletti lay down on a sofa with his clothes on and devoured half a cushion in his anger But the cushion made him forget the parrot.

### III

Meanwhile at Musocco, on the road between the station and the first houses, Signor Claudio Ballanzini was walking with the fair Margherita Spazzoletti on his arm When he was awakened by Margherita's cry of alarm, found that his legitimate spouse was no longer there, and understood from Margherita's confused and agitated explanation more or less what had happened he did not see that there was anything to cry about. As a matter of fact, it all seemed to him rather a charming adventure, and charming adventures always happened to him whenever he went on a journey And this particular one was charming enough to be the subject of a picture

Never mind, dear signora,' he began, laughing "Never mind—it's no easier to lose a husband than to find him again I'm sure my wife can't be lost I expect she's on the scent already That's right, calm yourself It's all right, quite all right You just behave as if you'd found your father instead—you'll be all right There's much more to laugh about than cry about Now we'll stop at Musocco, and be sure there's a

nest in my house for a poor little lost swallow—there, there. And when I think that Signora Ballanzini is a lost swallow too, then I can feel great big tears coming.”

And the dear old man laughed; but his eyes were really full of tears. For twenty years he had not felt so happy.

Margherita was a shrewd little thing, and she understood at once that this good man was perfectly trustworthy. He really did look like the father of a family. So she accepted his protection, wiped her eyes, and gave him her hand as a sign of confidence. At Musocco they got out of the train and sent off their telegram, and then they set off arm-in-arm, for all the world like a newly-married couple. Signora Ballanzini's house was the first in the village; it had a garden in front, surrounded by a railing. The night was as described above; Signor Claudio had rarely seen a more lovely one in the last forty years. He walked along the white and moonlit street, and the fair lady, whom Providence had sent him, leaned lightly on his arm. It was like the angel leading Tobit. He felt as if he had turned into a little boat sailing on a blue sea; and if it hadn't been for the fact that he felt his tongue tied, and that his emotions seemed to melt in his mouth like sugar, or that surprise and novelty, combined with a sense of duty and responsibility (in short, the respect due to a lady), restrained him, he would have declaimed a poem to her at once.

He saw she was wrapped up in her own thoughts, so to distract her he asked:

“Madam, do you like the moon?”

Margherita answered with a little laugh, like pearls threaded into a silver goblet.

“That's right, that's right—I like to see you laugh. Make hay while the sun shines—that's what I always say. I shouldn't worry about your husband if I were you; he's all right, you may be sure of that. Look what lovely stars and moon, and what a lovely sky, we've got here in Musocco! But all the stars together aren't as lovely . . . aren't as lovely as . . . may I pay you a compliment?”

“I think a father might be allowed to.”

“ . . . Aren't as lovely as your two eyes.”

“There are some things a father just doesn't say.”

“Father, father. . . . Oh, yes, I was a father too, once. But now I'm not any more.”

“What, are you a grandfather now, then?”

You little rascal      you're as slippery as an eel I do declare! You know I like clever women, they make me feel quite young again. There's nothing I dislike so much as people who are gloomy and stodgy and always pulling long faces. I always say: What are we on this earth for? 'Haven't you noticed? O foolish men that we are worms born to catch butterflies? And this evening I, a poor little Musocco worm have caught a butterfly with golden wings.

Luckily just then they reached the garden gate. Paolino the manservant had heard his master's voice in the distance and came to open the door, but he was so sleepy he paid absolutely no attention to his mistress.

Paolino Teresa Patacca! Here bring us a light at once!

When the servants heard their master's voice daring to give orders in his own house they realized some great and extraordinary event must have come to pass—such as Signora Margherita having eaten too much of the curate's excellent hare.

So you can imagine their astonishment when they came in with the lamps and saw instead of their mistress a young and charming woman as lovely as a Madonna with a face that would have made poor Patacca's shoes (which were all full of nails) dance about by themselves. Signor Claudio winked and assuming an air of great innocence told them:

At Varese we met a famous charlatan who was selling the Elixir of Youth. My wife drank a bucketful and now you see what's happened—you really would never think it was the same woman now would you?

When he saw how amazed the poor servants looked at his remarks he began dancing about and roaring with laughter. Then he turned to Signora Spazzoletti and said to her in his politest manner:

Please make yourself quite at home and treat this as you would your own house. You see here are books and magazines and there's the piano. I'll just go and give some orders now and see that my little swallow finds a nest worthy of her. We've got a room up on the second floor, we always call it Cecilia's room—it was supposed to be for a daughter of ours who died when she was twelve and we only put people we're really fond of in it. So you will behave won't you exactly as if it were your own father's house and give any orders you like and ask for whatever you want?

Margherita pressed her good host's hand again feeling quite

touched by his kindness. As soon as he went out, she began looking round, and thought it really was rather odd, her being in such a place all alone among strangers, at that hour of the night—when she had been abandoned, like a poor little foundling child. The thought of her husband was uppermost in her mind. Whatever would he think of her if he knew? And what was she to think of him? Was it just chance, or was it all a plot? Was it a punishment, or was it sheer neglect? Obviously she had cruelly insulted him in public; but then he had called her chatterbox and fussy, and so on . . . which is just as bad as "parrot."

The room in which she found herself was furnished in the most provincial taste, but also very richly. A French window opened out into the garden, where clumps of rose-bushes stood pale under the pale light of the moon. It was a fine, mild evening. Margherita went out and followed a dark little path shining in the moonlight, as far as a place where a tiny fountain was gushing out from the midst of rocks. From here she could see the whole façade of the house, white in the light of the moon. The shadow of the eaves and the trembling shadow of the trees invested it with the enchantment that night is wont to lend to buildings—and to sentimental souls. In the far corner of the garden, a grove of tall pine-trees stood dark and melancholy in the night. And the idea of the house, of the paradise she had so often dreamed of at Leopoldo's side, flashed vividly across her mind. She ventured a little farther along the gravel path under the trees, which led up to a little hillock, and she felt a kind of wondering thrill when she thought of the passion he had so often promised her. How lovely it would be to stroll, as she used to do, under that temple of evergreens, lit up here and there by the faint rays of the wandering moon, leaning on the arm of the man she loved.

Why did Leopoldo no longer love her? If he had come out just then from behind that tree, oh how hard she would have hugged him so as never to lose him again! And her eyes filled with tears and her heart with bitterness. When she got back to the house again, she found her kind host, having changed his clothes, was waiting for her near a table covered with plates and glasses, biscuits and flowers, and other little trifles.

"We can sit and talk a bit now, while they're getting the coffee and the soup ready. As a matter of fact, it's really too early to go to bed yet, and a good talk is a good thing to send

you to sleep afterwards, though I don't know whether I shall ever get to sleep without my better half " "

Margherita took off her hat and dolman, and sat down in a chair that Signor Claudio had moved up to the table. When he had brought it up, he stood a moment behind her as she sat, and was able to see what wonderful, rich, honey-coloured hair she had and how it was done, with a simplicity which Signora Ballanzini was totally incapable of attaining. He was also able to observe how clever the Milanese are when they wear close-fitting clothes, they spare stuff and, incidentally, set off the figure so beautifully. Which is as good as saying that spending less means gaining more.

Margherita had to obey, and accept what her host so kindly offered. They had already told each other their names, the Cavaliere Spazzoletti was not unknown at Musocco. They almost got as far as discovering they were relations. So she was called Margherita too? Well, what coincidences one comes across, and what differences too, to be sure! Signor Claudio liked Margherita's wit and distinction, he liked her aristocratic slinness and above all he liked the way she pointed her lips when she sipped her coffee. And when she held her cup, she arched her little finger so adorably that if her glances had not made him feel rather shy he would have been irresistibly drawn to kiss it. They talked about all sorts of things, and at last got back to the subject of Cecilia, who had died ten years ago. If she had been alive now, she would have been exactly Margherita's age. Perhaps it was that all her elegance and smiling youthfulness were too much for him, or perhaps it was that he confused his graceful little guest with the image of Cecilia, but whatever it was, Signor Claudio became gradually more and more melancholy.

"Who plays the piano?" asked the signora.

"We bought it for Cecilia—she used to play quite nicely. We keep it now in memory of her."

"There's music here too."

"They're all the things little Cecilia was learning when she died."

"Do you mind if I just look at them?"

"Not a bit. I'd like it very much if you would."

Margherita sat at the piano, opened the music, and began playing *The Violets*, a simple and charming mazurka tune. When Signor Claudio sitting there in his arm-chair, heard these

notes, that had been hurried with Cecilia these ten years (ever since the day she had felt faint on that very piano-stool), sounding softly in the silence of the night, while the scent of flowers came in from the garden, he closed his eyes, and joined his hands in prayer. And so, sitting there with his eyes closed, he called up the image of Cecilia in his mind; and when he opened his eyes again, he liked to think it was she who was sitting at the piano.

"Please play it again," he said, when she had finished.

For the music that floated over the garden and through the house reminded him not only of poor Cecilia, but also of an invisible world of lovely and noble things which he had never known but which seemed to lie unborn in the depths of his heart.

"I seem," he said, opening his hands, "I seem to hear angels flying over the roof."

Then he wanted her to play again, and then drink another glass of Cyprus wine . . . and so, among compliment and conversation, they heard eleven o'clock strike from the campanile of Musocco.

It seemed about time to go to bed; so Signor Claudio offered his arm again, and accompanied his "little angel" to the door of her room, while Savina went on ahead with the lamp. The room was all white, like a child's room. Signor Claudio felt sorry he had talked about death and melancholy things, and wanted to leave Margherita with some joke to amuse her. So he bent over her, holding her little hand in his, kissed it respectfully, and in a voice full of emotion he said:

"Mind you don't fall out of bed. I sleep underneath."

A quarter of an hour later Signor Claudio put out his light, laughing and crying to himself. And when he slept that night, he dreamed he saw a white butterfly flitting to and fro over his bed.

#### IV

Next day the Cavaliere Spazzoletti and Signora Ballanzini arrived at Musocco by the Arona train. He threw himself into Margherita's arms, exclaiming: "Poor darling! Oh, you poor darling!" While Signora Ballanzini tweaked her husband's ear when he had helped her down from the carriage, and said: "You wretch, you 'll explain all this!"

It was only natural that a friendship should spring up between the Spazzolettis and the Ballanzinis. That day they all dined together at Musocco. Even Signora Ballanzini was reassured, and friendship grew and prospered between them. And nine months later the Ballanzinis received a telegram from the cavaliere couched in the following terms: Boy. Please send nurse.

## LIFE IS SO LONG . . .

MATILDE SERAO

THE woman to whom the following letters were addressed, and who handed them over to me so that the last of her bitter thoughts should be banished from her mind, is still living; but she is now far away and forgotten. It is so long now since the storms have tossed her heart; it is so long since she has reached calm waters; it is so long since she no more thrills for love. And if ever these letters I am publishing should come to her notice, perhaps she would not even recognize them. For love is so short a thing; and life is so long.

20 June.

MY LADY,

It is very strange. Why am I writing to you? I have never written letters to a woman before; I have never addressed a poem to one either. Yet last night I wrote a poem to you, and tore it up this morning at dawn. And now this evening I am writing to you. This all intrigues me. Of course I may be suffering from some holy, mystical fever. Or I may be merely getting childish. One ought to be ashamed of being childish at thirty, particularly as I have my reputation for being a strong and intelligent man to keep up, and I daren't lose my reputation. I imagine you're laughing now; and the idea makes me turn pale with anguish. As a matter of fact, you always laugh; I've never, never seen you smile. You begin to laugh with your white forehead, and with the sparkling light in your eyes, that seems to strike sparks from the corners of your eyelids, and then with the almost imperceptible quiver of your nostrils, and your lips slightly lifted at the corners so that your teeth show beneath them. Can anything make you sad—you who laugh at everything? Tell me; and I will go and fetch that thing at once, just so as to see you pensive. I believe you never think, just as you never smile. Your post card is so perfumed and so small, so lively and so witty, with its gay, brisk, nervous

little phrases But just in a corner one word stands out, harmonious and caressing—the word *dream* . Lady, do you ever dream? I do, always, I dream whatever I like And that is something at the same time wonderfully beautiful and wonderfully sad I should like to be able to think that dreams had something fateful about them, and that in dreams one's will was completely subordinate What do you dream about? I'm asking you this indiscreet question just so as not to get any answer I should hate it if you did tell me what your dreams were about, I don't know what I should do if you told me. I admit, lady, I am afraid I couldn't tell you what I am afraid of, but this unknown fear is all the more terrifying because it is unknown. You must reassure me, then Speak to me of the future no, that is dangerous, of the past, then You went away in the most extraordinary way I swear you went away much too soon I had so many terribly important things to tell you Though if you had stayed two more days, I probably shouldn't have told you them, and still felt I had to tell you—just as I do now It was a Monday, and one really shouldn't begin the week by going away But if you had waited and not gone till Saturday, then I should have said one shouldn't end the week by going away either You were wearing black, I wonder whether you were in mourning for someone—or for something, perhaps? O lady, tell me the names of the dead buried in the graveyard of your heart! It was dawn do you remember?—a grey dawn, grey like the damp and sleeping city itself Several of us got up to accompany you to the station, and we were all a bit dazed, it was so early in the morning You were laughing, I remember Then you shook hands all round When it came to my turn, you stopped a moment standing there on the pavement, with your hand in mine I was looking up the road and you were looking down You whispered "Thank you" to me What did you thank me for? I couldn't answer you, for the morning breeze made my voice sound weak and trembling Then you jumped into the train, we crowded round, waved to you, and saw you go

No, that's wrong, I didn't see you go In the dawn, I had a mist before my eyes What did I do that day? I don't know People said I went round looking like a cretin, with a glassy stare I was very much ashamed of myself, I can tell

I remember vaguely the white feather in your hat, in the wind Why did you take my handkerchief

away with you? You wrote and told me that your little begonia died while you were away . . . because you were away, perhaps. I'm sorry about that. There's a begonia dead through solitary virtue. Who'll take account of it? No one. I wonder whether there's a Flowers' Paradise. A lot of flowers ought to go to hell, they make people commit such sins. How lovely hell must be, with all the flowers blazing and never burning! You'll notice from this letter I'm very cheerful—very cheerful indeed. In fact I'm witty all the time. My friends tell me I'm incomparable. Oh, if I wasn't afraid of making a joke, I should say I was being desperately funny. My dear lady, I've been writing you quantities of the most unpardonable rubbish. But I want to ask your permission to write some more—only much more serious. Either you will forgive me everything, or you won't forgive me. I am a sinner. But I'm a child too—a child stammering and trembling and praying. . . .

LUCIANO.

P.S. Are you coming to Leghorn, for the bathing? Without . . . any one?

10 September.

My torment, my sweet one, my passionate tiger, my dear gazelle with the dying eyes, my torture, my all-embracing love!

Write to me quick—quick, and tell me you love me, and tell me I am your Luciano! Send me a wire to say you love me. It is two days now since I have seen you, since I have last seen my black-eyed gipsy. I haven't seen you all this time; it makes me all angry and impatient to think of it—and I shan't see you now till to-morrow evening. I'm feverish; I always am now. And you are my fever. My God! What a love! I have a sort of feeling in my breast, right here in the very flesh itself, as if I had a vine within me growing up and up and then down again, to right and to left, gnawing at my very substance. And then I am born anew, only to be torn and tormented again a moment later. And in my head, just here under the temples, I can feel a little nail piercing my brain, quite charmingly. I take chloral for my insomnia. Chloral does me a lot of good; but all the same I prefer your kisses. I do prefer them, indeed I do! Lillia, my lily, I am lost! I have taken a leap out of reality, somehow. I derive my life

from you your soul and your body and your name And I am in agonies I am surrounded by a hectic whirl of business I can hear my friends speaking to me and I shake people by the hand but it all seems to be a confusion of pale phantoms a vague sort of murmur or a ghostly landscape—the sort of thing Hoffmann dreamed of And the only sweet gentle colourful scented ringing loud passionate vibrating note is love Lill a I am lost! We are delirious together Lilla my vestal virgin purple-clad like a Bacchante The sun shines but that's no use and to-night the stars will shine—but that won't be any use either for you are neither in the stars nor in the sun I am dying dear lady! Save me I beseech you! I owe everything to you—I owe you the feast of my life! I owe you my faith you are my Damascus Come you must not let me die What a terrible thing this love is! It is ghastly when I stop a moment and think what I am really like My senses are devoured by a morbid longing for danger I am overcome by a mad desire for the precipice—this is passion! Lill a my Lilla! Mine mine mine! Your letter is really part of you I know it all by heart It is burning me under my cheek it is engraved in my heart You mustn't write to me like that you mustn't drive me mad with your letters your letters like liquid fire Give me snow give me ice I am burning Be pitiful and be serene Let my love burn itself out do not destroy me in your flames O lovely Lilla why are you so lovely so unconsciously cruel and so consciously kind? I love you like that Don't tell me who you are I don't wish to know you I only want to love you you lovely mysterious creature You sphinx you are tearing my heart out but I do not wish to know your secret Be still De with me silently in the deep deep secret of our love O live with me Live with me Lilla and love me! You are truth incarnate you are a blazing light you are the flaming noon To me you represent the highest form of love reality more wonderful than any ideal My imagination and my mind and my heart my lips and my eyes are all wildly in love with you You will see to-morrow night If you don't come I shall be in hell I am twisted and tortured like a serpent in this agony of waiting O God What love is this tearless but so desperate? What love is this whose smile is torture and whose glance is fire? God God—I can't stand this it's intolerable I am twisted and torn into pieces my heart is breaking my head is breaking!

Oh that I could put into words this shivering and burning and hesitating and convulsion and fever and passion of my wild and implacable love, and make you delirious too with my fever! I am burning, Lillia, I am dying.

LUCIANO.

20 December.

DEAR FRIEND,

I see from your last letter that you are still agitated and feverish and anxious. Calm yourself, sweetest Lillia. Think; you have just as many duties as I have. I love you dearly, you know I do; it is useless repeating it. You are the only woman I have ever loved. My only wish is to see you quiet and serene again. I do not wish to have to feel remorse for troubling your life; I am ready to sacrifice myself on the fire of my love, if that would make you happy. And I love you dearly—you know I do. If love exists at all, then I have loved you indeed. I should like to be able to instil in you that lofty contempt for everything which has become the guiding principle of my life. Be cold and disdainful, and then you will be happy. Do not force yourself to see others weep; do not weep yourself. Only laugh and you will be happy. Scepticism has its joys as well. And scepticism is suited to a lofty soul like yours. Perhaps we shall meet again soon. I urge you to remember to be self-controlled on that day. Hide your feelings and laugh. Don't you see I do it? Life is such a vulgar and ridiculous thing.

LUCIANO.

# THE BARRISTER'S THREE CASES

A. PANTINI

SIGNOR FLAVIO SEMILLI came of a good Venetian family, he was an attorney and a doctor of law, he was a married man with a family, a free citizen, and an elector. Yet one day, when he was no less than thirty five years old, he found himself absolutely on the rocks.

This may all seem very absurd, especially when you think that Signor Semilli had always been an excellent student and had won high and constant praise from those he came into contact with.

How had it come about, then?

Even he himself could not have told you exactly.

He had originally had a government post, known as a vice-prætorship; then the X law was passed, the post had been abolished, and Semilli found himself without a job.

He stayed at home for a while, living on his scanty savings, and waiting to be given another job which had been promised him by the Government. Even in Rome, Semilli used to say, it is just like in Dante "Lunga promessa con l'attender corto"—promising much and performing little.

Then he had taken on a series of different jobs, each worse paid and more precarious than the last, till one day he found himself, as we have already said, with neither money nor prospects in view.

The question was, what should he do now? The answer was quite simple: he would go to Milan, the City of the Fairy Glance, where all Italy's poor come, with the grey autumn mists, dazzled by the mirage of the riches of Lombardy.

Actually Semilli had not come with the grey autumn mists at all but with a gay April sun that made the little Madonna on the Duomo flash and sparkle, but, nevertheless, Fortune had not smiled on

He had an iron-coloured beard, long and unkempt, growing on his cheeks, his collar and tie were worn & well-deserved holiday, and

his shoes, after pacing the muddy, shifting stones of the town, had radically changed their appearance, and it was all in vain that polish and little black silk patches tried to cover the mortal wounds beneath. He was really hardly presentable like this; but he was redeemed by a pair of clean gloves which he kept carefully put away in an inner pocket of his overcoat, and then a really smart little walking-stick of real ebony with a real ivory knob.

He had been looking for work for two months now, with great perseverance if not with much enthusiasm, but he had not been at all successful. The gospel saying, "*Pulsate et aperiteur vobis—knock and it shall be opened unto you,*" which is excellent when applied to the gates of Heaven, is very little use indeed when applied to the doors of Milanese business men.

It is true that a kindly providence had weakened his brain a little (he himself admitted that the nerves of his head, as he put it, were in a bad way), so that now he did not even notice the disdain that underlay promises, the hypocrisy in sympathy, and the insults of indifference.

In his opinion of mankind in general he had attained a degree of pessimism that showed he had reached the last stages of abject poverty far more than any actual evolution in his philosophy. Under such circumstances, men begin to believe not only in the innate wickedness of the whole human race, but also in persecution, in the evil eye, in fate and destiny, etc., which are terrible things to believe in. They may really exist to a certain extent, but, to a far greater extent, they come from a sort of pathetic weakening of the power to resist in man. However, in the particular case we are now considering, Semilli's pessimism was good-natured, gentle, and humorous, after the true manner of the Venetians; it was applied to no one in particular, and implied nothing tragic or rebellious.

It was only when he thought of his wife and children that his eyes grew wet with tears; and as he looked up at the little Madonna on the cathedral, so calm and good and far away, he remembered Filicaia's famous lines:

E tu 'l vedi e 'l comporti,  
E la destra di folgori non armi.  
O pur gh'aventi a gl'insensati marmi?

(And Thou seeing it yet dost tolerate it, and dost not arm Thy right hand with thunderbolts? Or dost Thou hurl them at the insensate marble?)

But the little Madonna up on the cathedral made no answer to his proud soliloquy, she rather seemed to be saying, with her hands extended "It's not my fault," and in Milanese dialect "Mi ghe n'impodi no." Perhaps it would be a better idea to go round and recite the whole of that magnificent poem in the cafés.

In days gone by, when he was still at school, the master had given the most impressive "ten out of ten" for his perfect recitation. How could those great, strong men, eating their sausages and their *risotto*, fail to be stirred when they heard him begin

E fiso e quando inulta  
Fian, Signore i tuoi servi?

(How long O Lord, shall Thy servants be unavenged?)

He thought of it once or twice, but only for fun, of course, for a Doctor of Law, and, moreover, an ex-government official, does not stoop to such depths seriously. So he disposed of it as an attractively original, rather American sort of expedient, to be resorted to in extreme cases only. "After all," he thought, "what's wrong in it?" He could have given even that poem, which had been praised and rewarded by the Holy Roman Emperor, a revolutionary tone suitable to modern times, by subtleties of voice and gesture. The invective against a proud and indifferent God would also go down superbly in this age of popular vindication. Semilli was consoling himself with these various ideas when he received two letters of introduction which he had been expecting for a long time now.

One was from the Right Hon. X for the Right Hon. Y, K.C., deputy of the Moderate Liberal Progressive Party. It consisted of just a few lines written by a secretary, but there was the Right Hon. X's signature at the bottom all right.

The other letter was from the learned priest, Father Z., and addressed to the Right Reverend Father V., one of the pillars of the Catholic Party in Lombardy, and a busy man with many important connections.

The two letters arrived together, like two bosom friends, and when Semilli had read them in great excitement, he could not help exclaiming joyfully "Two pigeons to one bean! Now I shall have plenty to eat, and what's left over I'll send home to the children!"

That day the little Madonna seemed more resplendent than

ever against the clear, blue sky, and all the people Semilli met seemed kind and benevolent.

At ten o'clock in the morning Semilli was waiting in the Right Hon. Y.'s hall. With one hand he clutched the letter of introduction in his pocket, carefully wrapped up in a sheet of newspaper so as not to get crushed; his other hand was thrust inside his coat, over his precious document and over his palpitating heart.

After a long time, a footman came and asked for the letter; and soon after showed him into his master's presence.

A fine, vigorous man of about fifty greeted Semilli with a most benevolent smile, and after the usual polite remarks, motioned him to a magnificent red velvet arm-chair, into which he sank luxuriously. Then, putting down his right honourable colleague's letter, he invited his visitor, with a splendid gesture, to explain the reason why he had come to see him.

Semilli began talking rather nervously, illustrating what he said by a variety of documents and diplomas and government certificates, which he unfolded with trembling, gloved hands.

The great man listened with his benevolent smile, and put in a word or two now and then with a sympathetic gesture: "Rotten luck . . . poor thing!" When Semilli paused, he raised his hand—his extremely beautiful hand—as a sign that now he had something to say, and began:

"My dear young man——"

"Alas! I'm no longer young, sir——" Semilli ventured timidly.

"Nonsense! As long as you've got all those magnificent hopes, you're still a young man, if you'll allow me to say so. My dear young man, your case is really pitiful, especially as circumstances seem to be against you, and one cannot argue against circumstances. You are the victim of a new law—I quite see that—one of the most unjustly treated of all the victims, I might almost say. The question is now, what is to be done about it? You know the saying: *dura lex, sed lex*. But, whatever happens, I shall remember you when next I go to Rome. I shall try and find out, and see whether you can possibly be got back into your old job by some indirect means or other, or possibly through some other department. It is that you want me to do, isn't it? After all, that's where the main road lies; we'll stick to that at first, and then we'll be

able to see what other possibilities there are. Well, you may be sure I will do what I can for you, I know it's a case that really is worth looking into.

To tell the honest truth, the humble petitioner (for so he is officially known) was not even asking so much as was being suggested, for the age limit was one of the many obstacles standing in his way, but since such an important representative of his nation as the man he was now talking to had chosen to value it in that sense, well, so much the better! The only thing to do now was to beseech him to do it quickly, so very diffidently Semilli suggested.

And supposing you wrote——?"

"No, no, *et pour cause*, the Keeper of the Seals is a great friend of mine, but you know they really only treat letters in a purely conventional sort of way, they have all the answers ready written. No, you'd better wait till I go to Rome, you'd much better wait."

Then he went on more easily, as if he had given way to a thought that had been worrying him. "What it really amounts to, you see, is—— What's the matter with us Italians is that we lack energy, we're not nearly independent enough, we haven't the courage of our convictions. Look at the way the English and the Americans go on! But, good Lord, you won't leave your mother's apron-strings or your wife's, for that matter, you want just any little job, a little job that you can just manage to live by, and then you're satisfied. Of course I don't mean you personally, I mean people in general, don't you know? You ought to go round the world, and explore, and do things! The boundaries of Italy lie far beyond Italy, that's what I always say. There's Eritrea and the Belgian Congo, and the Argentine, and the great unexplored regions of Patagonia. Do you happen to know any of those places?"

"No only by name."

"Well there you are! They're real gold mines, those places are—gold, gold, gold! There's a new life opening out to us, while our old life is decrepit and dying, we stop here dreaming about ideals of social equality and goodness knows what, which only mean the destruction of all normal human responsibility and energy and power, or else we toil in vain to get the world back to its old state of theocracy, and all those useless and burdensome old dogmas, without taking into account all the centuries of martyrdom, and progress, and light, that have

gone between. The first's just a feeble complication of a purely automatic existence, and the other would be merely silly and pitiful if the hereditary stupidity of the proletariat had not boosted it up with their incurable cowardice, don't you think so?"

"Indeed I do——"

"If only I were as young as you, I should have made up my mind long ago. I can't bear this sort of life, all the spirit of revenge and hatred and mean conflict that you see going on now everywhere, in journalism, and in politics, in the street, and in the universities."

As he spoke he got up and stood there, majestic and eloquent, beside the great, inlaid walnut table, and resting his hand on a big bundle of papers on the green baize tablecloth.

Semilli thought he had better get up too, from the soft depths of the velvet arm-chair where he had been made to sit down.

"I know you have a fine and noble nature," he said, because he could not think of anything else to say.

"I haven't really, you know; it's all the result of long study and reflection. Think over what I've said to you, and if you can't get a job here, try and see what you can do abroad; renew your life in strange and in freer lands."

Semilli understood quite well that the audience was supposed to be over; but he made one last effort and said:

"Yes, I'd thought about leaving Italy too. But I don't see how I can, now, what with my wife, and two small children——"

The right honourable and florid gentleman looked down at the poor creature in front of him, who seemed all of one colour, a pathetic study in sallowness, although his beard was not quite the same tone as his pale face; and the great man looked so sympathetic that Semilli's heart went out to him; but alas! all the right honourable gentleman said was:

"Yes . . . that's the whole problem—it's a very difficult problem that one might sum up like this: 'As things are now, is the man who begets and brings up a family really doing good in the eyes of society?' I admit it is a terrible problem!" And he bent his head thoughtfully, as if he had some great and weighty matter to decide.

Just then an elegantly dressed man came in without knocking. Semilli heard a simultaneous "My dear friend!" in a very different voice from that which the right honourable gentleman had hitherto used.

"So sorry," said the intruder "I'd no idea you were busy," and he began going away again.

"No no, I can see you now," the great man answered briefly. Then adopting his oratorical manner again, he put his hand on the young man's shoulder, and as he pushed him gently towards the door, he declared "Here is the best advice I can give you—and you know I am human enough—the best advice I can give to a strong young man like you, and that advice is *Sursum corda*, go on beyond the boundaries of those who lack initiative, beyond and beyond towards the horizons of eternal liberty! As to what we've been talking about, I will speak to the minister about it personally. You may be sure I won't forget you, you can take my word for it."

The young man felt his hand being taken and given a mighty shake, and then found himself in the secretaries' room, in the midst of a general scratching of pens.

Through there, said one of the clerks, without raising his eyes.

"No, that's the way to the kitchen," the footman said, laughing as he handed him his hat and his cane with the elegant handle.

"If that wretched man hadn't come in just then, I should have asked him for a post just as one of his clerks," he thought as he went pensively downstairs. "I've got my ideals too, just as much as he has, I've got plenty of ideals, but I should have been glad enough to get any sort of odd job in the meantime. I expect he realized he had to do with one of his equals—because after all my degree is the same as his, and we've both been called to the Bar—and didn't like to offer me an inferior sort of job."

Once he had got out into the street, he turned round as if he were considering which way to go, and then decided to go upstairs again and say he would not mind taking on a very inferior job temporarily, as long as he got something at once. But then he suddenly remembered the other letter he had addressed to the Very Reverend Father V., and inspired by a sort of frenzied feeling that he must settle something immediately, he rushed off at once to the priest's house.

He inquired whether the priest was in. Yes, they said, he was. Semmlé handed over the letter and besought them to let him see Father V. immediately.

They left him alone on the doorstep. He had hurried so much and got so excited that the perspiration trickled down his face and his poor handkerchief was quite incapable of dealing with it or of saving his unfortunate collar.

At last he was shown in. As soon as he got into the room he had a pleasing impression of cool and quiet; all his eyes could distinguish was the reddish glow of a brass lamp hanging by three chains before a great crucifix. Then his eyes got used to the darkness, and in the dim light he managed to make out heavy bookcases, and high-backed leather chairs arranged in a semi-circle, as if they were waiting for a meeting to take place. Suddenly the curtain over the door was pushed aside, and a slight figure in a priest's gown, with a wide sash round his waist, glided rapidly and silently past the heavy furniture. Semilli felt a soft hand touch his, and heard a quick, hurried voice saying: "Tell me what it is."

Semilli told his story—his long, sad story. The man of God sat there with his head leaning on his thumb and forefinger; all you could see of him was his strong, broad forehead and shiny crown surrounded by scanty black hair.

Semilli told his story; the priest did not interrupt him once. When he spoke of his wife and children, or repeated one of his usual remarks—that he was not the sort of man who found strength in misfortune, or who got used to doing wrong—he made a long sobbing noise. The chairs, ready for a meeting, did not move; the lamp did not even quiver, the huge crucifix looked quite indifferent.

The man of God raised his head; now you could see it perfectly well, his pale face with the sharp nose standing out between vivacious black eyes.

He pronounced these words solemnly, as if they had been specially prepared for sympathy beforehand:

"It is a sad story, poor thing; and there are stories sadder still. It often makes our hearts weep, when we can do nothing better to help the people who come to us, than give them sterile spiritual advice. But I want you to be quite clear about this: evil tongues have been so busy against us, with their continual, subtle, poisonous slander, that even good people like you are still a little suspicious of us, I think, in spite of everything. Come and see. . . ." He took Semilli's hand, and led him to a desk which he opened, and took out a great bundle of papers. He turned them over at first, and then began reading bits here



"But I—I——" Semilli murmured. "What—what fault is that of mine?"

"You? You're just like every one else, you are suffering for the sins of your fathers. This is the law, and the terrible punishment for your sins!"

The priest calmed down and offered Semilli some money, which he refused; then he was dismissed, and found himself out in the street again.

He stood there in the street; it was noon, on a fine, sunny day. The cafés were beginning to fill up with their usual crowd of customers; the smell of *risotto* and stews was wafted out through the big windows. It seemed exactly the right moment

hand to, long, O Lord, wilt Thou leave Thy servant unavenged?" what it: then he was not thinking of such vain and frivolous Semilli

sat there so that he was absolutely alone, with no one to bother you could at happened to him, and nothing to eat, and his crown surmised that he ought to have been able to support

Semilli for, so far away, tortured him and held him like When he and his neck, so that his poor mouth was violently usual remain.

strength wouldn't reasonably expect people to help him, all the made a load a perfect right to long for something to comfort did not prevent his staying all alone with that ghastly impression looked quail being absolutely abandoned and deserted. There

The man say people, all round him, too. . . . well, his people said he must make a formal request for work and vivacious back later on. So he went back later, and they told

He pronounced round another time. specially proposed he must be patient about it; he really expected "It is a . . . . . like that, after all. But what pained him the

still. It seemed how terribly indifferent people were whenever better to him about his misfortunes. They stopped and listened spiritual & already knew the whole story by heart, just as if it evil tongue the tale of Vispa Teresa and the Butterfly.

subtle, suddenly, as he was turning over these sad thoughts in still a and, he remembered the name of a man he had seen men-Come all over the place, in the papers, at meetings, and what a des'and who always inveighed against the wrongs of human He acty; he prophesied about the future, and proclaimed a new

era of truth and love and light for all the unfortunate ones of the earth

Semilli did not actually know the man, but it really did not seem to matter. "I will go and see him," he thought. "I'm sure he'll listen to what I've got to say."

He waited under one of the arcades till lunch time was over because he did not want to disturb the great man, who presumably had lunch time too, just like any other human being.

A good woman in a newspaper kiosk, who was busy emptying a big bowl of soup, explained to him where the man he wanted lived.

"Oh, he's hardly ever at home you know," they told him at the door. "I should try at the newspaper offices, if I were you."

So Semilli went there to look. He was in, but it meant a whole business getting hold of him. Finally, however, Semilli was shown into his office.

"Sit down sit down," he said in a pleasant, frank, genial voice, the sort you would expect from such a man. He was barely visible behind a great pile of papers and books and letters. "Sit down," he repeated, and went on reading as he motioned Semilli to a chair, which he took after some hesitation.

"This is my name," Semilli said, getting up from his chair and producing his last visiting-card but one from his pocket book.

"Excuse me a moment—now I'm ready," and he took the proffered card. "I am afraid I haven't the pleasure," he said when he had inspected Semilli's poor name for some time with a frown.

"Oh but I know you," Semilli said. "In fact, I think every one knows you. You are our hope, the future—"

Semilli's words seemed to make very little impression on the Man of the Future's face. He merely turned the splendour of his gold rimmed glasses on his visitor, and said:

"You are too kind—altogether too kind! Now will you tell me what you have come to see me about?"

Doctor Semilli writhed in agony. He may have expected the great man to have read the reasons for his coming, and all his distress in his dead white face, as in that wonderful book *I Promessi Sposi*, where Cardinal Federigo says: "My friend, I know why you have come to see me, I am quite prepared to help you. You have waited too long, did you expect me to come and see you?"

I don't know whether Semilli actually did think this, because I haven't done enough psychology to be sure; but I do know that poor Semilli got the impression that the Man of the Future was behaving exactly as a man of the past or any ordinary man at the present time would behave.

"Please forgive me——" he began timidly. "I am afraid—I dared—I mean I hadn't a letter of introduction or anything——"

"That doesn't matter in the least——"

"Yes. I thought perhaps it wouldn't. I said to myself: 'You need to be careful about all those formalities with most men, but you can go to him just as you go to church . . .'"

The comparison was quite unsuitable from the political point of view, as well as being the grossest flattery; but our hero's brain, as I have said before, had become rather weak lately on account of all his misfortunes or, as he said himself, the nerves of his head were in such a state that he could never manage to think of the proper thing to say at the proper time when he wanted to get things out of people.

"Well, you see, it's——" began Semilli in a voice that would have made any one in a hurry shudder.

Just then a servant came in with a telegram. Semilli stopped talking.

"Go on, go on; I can listen just as well like this. . . ."

So Semilli went on.

The Man of the Future opened the telegram, read it in his usual leisurely way, and stuck it on a file fixed on an agate stand. Then he took a blue chalk and made several little marks on some sheets of paper in a corner, and when he had marked them, he transferred them to another part of the desk.

The servant came in a second time.

"The proofs, sir," he said in a sing-song voice, and put down a big envelope on the desk.

"At last!" said the Man of the Future.

He tore the envelope open; and as soon as the damp proof-sheets were released, they unrolled and spread over the whole surface of the desk. He arranged them sheet by sheet, and then began looking them over eagerly.

"Go on, never mind me," he said, turning to poor, wretched Semilli, who had stopped talking, partly from respect, and partly just because he could not think of anything more to say.

This great man, who was an experienced and celebrated

psychologist, knew perfectly well how, and exactly by what physiological processes of the nervous system, it happens that sometimes even the finest orator may begin to stutter and lose the thread of his argument when his audience or listener is hostile or inattentive, indeed he had even published his opinions on the subject

He knew all these things scientifically, but just then he had obviously forgotten them.

Semilli mentioned the Government every now and then, and then the great man, as he read, would make a sort of "Get thee behind me, Satan" gesture, and now and then made a little correction on his proofs

When Semilli had done his story, the journalist put the proofs down, came up to his visitor, and said in a pleasant, friendly voice

"I am sorry—really terribly sorry—for other people's sake as well as for your own, because, you know, lots of people come and see me, just as if I had the honour of being God Almighty

and I must admit that there are things that upset me dreadfully, things that when you hear them . . . Well, you know, I can't do anything, all the sort of jobs that would suit you are in the hands of the *bourgeois* coalition. I could do plenty for you in some years' time, I daresay, but as for the present

I'm dreadfully sorry, but I'm afraid I'm no use at all. "

'But can't you—can't you just tell me what I must do next?' Semilli asked beseechingly

"You must persevere, you mustn't ever compromise—never, never, never! When you begin making compromises, that's the thin edge of the wedge, and after that there's no resisting. We haven't any feeling of class hatred, although our enemies keep insinuating that we have, but we know where salvation lies. We know there's only one means of salvation, and that is the abolition of all private property whatsoever. Everything else is mere futility, unless it just happens to be our opponents' cunning

Believe me, if ever we allow ourselves to make any compromise whatsoever, or any pact, or anything, while we're working as we are, or if we give up even the smallest part of our programme, then the whole thing's as good as done for. Of course some people say we'll get it all in due course. Well, what I say is, what does it matter what people say? Some day the victory will be ours—not just any sort of a victory, but a real one, a real, overwhelming, staggering victory! We mustn't

have any illusions, either, about the wonderful and unexpected triumphs we have enjoyed during these last two or three years. We've really gained too much ground; we must conquer people's consciousness so that they can rise up in the world as a new force, a new driving power, a new inspiration on earth! As a matter of fact, that was just what I was saying in this article here . . .” and he pointed to the proofs he was correcting.

Poor Semilli felt his throat dry; but he managed to ask all the same:

“But—I mean—what about now? What about my particular case?”

“Yes, of course,” said the great man, reluctantly turning aside from his argument. “Quite—your particular case. . . . Of course, if you were a working man, it would be comparatively easy, I could find something for you straight away; but a barrister—whatever do you expect me to do with a barrister? A barrister—I am still speaking of present conditions, you understand—represents a perfectly definite value in society when he has discovered the means of producing a given quantity of labour and of wealth; but a barrister begging for work is—well—like an engine asking to be pushed, what? I know I’m speaking harshly; I know I am. But we are modern men in speech as well as in action. Obviously, in a future state of society, these unfortunate cases will not be allowed to occur at all, for the simple reason that society and its rights won’t need any more defending. Don’t you think I’m right there?”

“Some work on the paper——” Semilli suggested timidly in an almost inaudible little voice.

But the great man heard, and smiled as a piano teacher smiles at the mistakes of a beginner.

“You know, if I listened to every one,” he said, “I shouldn’t run one paper, I should run a thousand. And I can assure you—only don’t pass this on to any one, I can trust you, can’t I?—it’s hard enough to make a living out of one . . . I should think it is hard! As a matter of fact,” he went on, when he saw how sad Semilli was looking, “you must admit that individual good works and private charity on behalf of the individual are quite useless in the collective cause; I would even go so far as to say that they definitely hinder it and put the end in view farther away than ever. As long,” he concluded, with a second burst of enthusiasm, “as long as the mind of the masses does not realize that as soon as we come into this life we inherit the

right to live, as a matter of course—the right to live, and the right to enjoy the immense accumulated treasure of science and of progress—well, till then, we shall always find a large section of the community asking a few men for things they consider as charity but which are really theirs by right. Don't you agree with me here?"

"Oh, indeed I do——" faltered Semilli.

"As for the individual point of view, I shall certainly bear your case in mind, come back again and see me—as a friend, you know, and," he added, coming closer, and speaking in a low, confidential voice, "if anything unforeseen happens (it may, you never know), remember me—as a friend."

Semilli came out feeling completely stupefied. Patagonia, the mentality of the masses, the abolition of private property, the horrors of liberal sectarianism, and the sins of the fathers visited upon the children were all hopelessly mixed up in his mind. It was a case of absolute chaos. Now and then, appalling ideas flashed across his brain, and when he had calmed down a bit, the sun was near its setting.

It was just the time when people took their evening stroll, beautiful carriages were rolling along the streets, and he had the impression that even the smartest people were all hustling and elbowing him out of the way. And as he went along, and as time went on, the crowd assumed the appearance of a kind of dark, moving, endless, violent substance before his tired eyes. And as the crowd actually forced him to step off the pavement into the road, so as to get by, Semilli's tired brain turned this action into something symbolical. "We're not wanted in this world, you're not wanted, your children aren't wanted! Out of it! Away with you!" But as a matter of fact, all the crowd wanted was to make him get out of its way. Why, someone actually said "I beg your pardon" to him!

"Considering what a lot of men there are," mused Semilli as he went along "and what a lot of needs, and so on, I suppose the struggle is carried on politely enough—quite kindly, too, and perhaps it will be better still in the future, one never knows. It might be much worse, in any case, than it is now!" Noble thoughts indeed, these, and quite worthy of being printed, but I should like to make it quite clear to people who are happy, that real, genuine poverty is wonderful for making even a perfectly ordinary man indulge in the deepest, most original, and

most philosophical considerations. But I don't advise them to try this experiment themselves, because it is otherwise highly disagreeable.

Semilli began to feel pangs of hunger; and almost automatically, without thinking what he was doing, he wandered out beyond the Volta Gate, where there was a particular store he knew, where he usually bought twopennyworth of ham to go with his twopennyworth of coarse bread. That was what his lunch consisted of; and on that particular day he had to make it do for dinner as well.

But that evening, as he reached the store, which was really a kind of big wholesale warehouse, he suddenly realized that all the shutters were down except one, and there were three fine closed carriages drawn up in front of the door. The horses pawed the ground and champed their bits, and up on the boxes sat liveried coachmen with big flowers in their buttonholes.

"A wedding! a wedding!" people said, rushing up to see.

Semilli paid no attention to what was going on, and went into the shop, holding his bit of bread carefully wrapped up in paper.

Unusually enough, the shop was quite empty. However, at the sound of footsteps, one of the shopkeepers appeared from behind a pyramid of hams and sausages and what not. He was a hearty youth, as fat as a calf; but Semilli hardly recognized him, he was so transformed.

He was dressed all in black, with a magnificent green satin tie and a colossal gold watch-chain.

"You know," he greeted Semilli, "you 'd have found the whole place shut if you 'd got here a minute later——"

"Why?"

"Why, to-day 's a great day, you see. My sister—the one you saw outside, you must have noticed her—is getting married to-day."

"I wish her joy, then——"

"Thank you, thank you," the youth said warmly. "What can I give you to-day?"

"Same as usual."

"Here you are, same as usual," murmured the fat shopkeeper, but he kept watching his poor customer on the sly all the time he was slicing the ham.

"Would you be so kind as to put a little salt with it?" Semilli asked.

The big youth took a pinch of salt out of a bowl and sprinkled

it slowly on the ham, and as he sprinkled you could see he was hatching an idea that he obviously meant to come to something. Usually he was absolutely devoid of bright ideas, but the violent contrast between poor Semilli's miserable meal and the great banquet that was being prepared for his sister's wedding gave rise to an unusually brilliant one that he could not possibly have had at any other time. The idea had been born, it was growing rapidly and evidently meant to come to light in a moment. Finally he said, in a shy way that contrasted oddly with his rough and brutal face

"It's not much of a meal                      it's a workman's sort of stuff, really                      only what workmen eat for lunch, you know."

Semilli, the barrister, was surprised, but he answered quite calmly

"I've been very unlucky lately, I can't get a job anywhere. I've never done any harm to any one, though——"

"No, I wasn't ever suggesting you had, why, any one could see you were honest all right, just to look at you! You're never a workman, are you?"

"No, I'm a barrister."

"What? You're a barrister?" shouted the worthy shopkeeper opening his eyes and mouth in his astonishment. "That's a good joke," he said at last, shrugging his shoulders and assuming his usual stolid expression again.

"No, really I am. Can you read?"

"Yes but I can't write very well."

"Well, look here then," and Semilli began displaying all the documents he invariably carried about with him—and particularly on that special day of conflict.

The shopkeeper could hardly believe his own eyes, he stared at the crested diplomas, that were really worth less, just then, than the paper the ham was wrapped up in, and he stared at the titles and the degree certificate on parchment, and then, at last, he said

"You're a barrister, are you? Is this really your name here, with all these letters and things? Why, my poor father wanted me to study for the Bar! But at school I never could remember whether the e's wanted accents or not, it's the devil of a thing to remember, I can tell you that, and if it hadn't been for those accents, why, I should have been a barrister too by now!"

Semilli let him go on talking, in his good old Milanese accent,

with hardly a smile; then he took up his little parcel and went off towards the door.

"Listen," said the shopkeeper, as though he had just made a momentous decision. "If you can't get a job just now, wouldn't you like to stay here with me? I expect if you're a barrister you can do book-keeping all right, can't you? I was just wanting someone to keep my accounts. Rosa—she's my sister, you know—used to keep the books, but now she won't be living in Milan any more. You'd get all your meals with us, you know, and two lire a day——"

Semilli did not answer; but his breast rose and fell in a gentle, melancholy sigh in the silence of the shop.

The youth noticed it, jumped down from the counter, shouted: "Throw away that old bit of bacon!" pushed him into the parlour behind the shop, and began yelling up a spiral staircase:

"Luigi! Rosa! Hi! I've found a new accountant!"

## CINCINNATUS

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

HE was not tall of stature, spare, flexible as a reed, with a lion's head slightly inclined to the left, covered with a wild wood of chestnut hair which came down to his shoulders in curls and snarls, sometimes streaming in the wind like a mane. He wore a beard like a Nazarene, and left it untrimmed and full of tiny bits of straw. His eyes were always downcast, looking at the tips of his bare feet. When he raised them to any one's face, they inspired terror, there was something strange and indefinable about them, sometimes they seemed the eyes of a fool at certain moments the eyes of a man with fever, now they made you think of the green water in a stagnant ditch and then of the bright flash of a Toledo sword.

He had an old red jacket thrown across his shoulders like a Spanish cloak worn with an arrogant air which made him look somehow dashing and lordly. People called him Cincinnatus, and said he had a bee in his bonnet, then they spoke vaguely of love betrayed, of a blow with a knife, of a flight.

When I first knew him in seventy-nine, I was thirteen years old. He attracted me. In the hot summer days when the great piazza was flooded with sun and on the burning pavements there was no living creature to be seen except a few stray dogs and no noise save the monotonous, wearying, strident sound of the knife grinder's wheel. I used to stand for half an hour at a time watching Cincinnatus from behind the half-closed blinds. He would pass by slowly, under the midday sun with the air of a bored nobleman; sometimes he would creep up quite close to the dogs very softly, so as not to be noticed, he would pick up a stone and cast it lightly in their midst, then turn away, pretending to be invisible. The dogs would gather round him wagging their tails while he burst into short, childish peals of laughter, well content. And I laughed too.

One day I took courage. When I was at my window, I put my head out and called "Cincinnatus!"

He turned quickly, saw me, smiled. I caught up a pink from a vase and flung it to him. We were friends from that day thenceforward.

He called me *Curlylocks*. One Saturday evening I was standing alone on the bridge watching the fishing fleet come home. There was a superb July sunset, all scarlet and gold clouds; toward the sea the river shone and trembled with most vivid light; under the hills the banks shadowed the water with green, casting in the reflection of their trees, groves of cane, thickets of reeds, tents of giant poplars whose heads seemed to sleep in the burning air. The boats were making port slowly, with their great sails, of orange-coloured red, set, striated or arabesqued in black. Two had already dropped anchor and were unloading their fish. There floated shorewards on the wind the sound of sailors' voices and the fresh odour of the rocks.

Turning quickly, I saw *Cincinnatus* before me. He was all in a sweat, with his right hand behind his back as if he were hiding something, and his mouth was lit by the familiar smile of a laughing boy.

"Oh, *Cincinnatus*!" I cried, holding out my pale little hand to him joyfully.

He stepped forward and held out to me a fine posy of flaming poppies and golden ears of corn.

"Thank you, thank you! How lovely they are!" I cried, taking them.

He drew his hand across his brow, wiping away the sweat which was running down, looked at his dripping fingers, looked at me, laughed.

"Poppies are red and stand in the midst of yellow corn, there in the fields. I saw them, I took them, I brought them to you, and you said: 'How lovely!' *Cincinnatus* took them from the fields. The sun was there, like a fire."

He spoke submissively, with pauses between his words. He made an effort to follow the thread of his thought; a thousand confused images gathered in his mind; he snatched at two, three, the least unsubstantial, the most coloured; and then the others flew away. You could see this in his eyes. I looked at him curiously, for he appeared beautiful to me. He noticed it at once, turning his head the other way towards the fishing-boats.

"The sail!" he said thoughtfully. "There are two sails, one above, and one below, in the water."

He did not seem to understand that the one below was a reflection. I explained it to him as best I could, he listened to me enchanted, but probably he did not understand. I remember that the word "diaphanous" struck him.

'Diaphanous,' he murmured strangely, and smiled, and then went on staring at the sails.

The petal of a poppy fell into the river. He watched it until it had gone.

'It is going far, far away,' he said, with an indescribable melancholy in his voice, as if the petal were beloved by him.

'From what village are you?' I asked, after a minute's silence.

He turned away to where the sky had become the colour of beryl, very pure. The violet mountains showed against the horizon like a recumbent cyclops. Farther away, on the river, there stretched the iron bridge, cutting the sky up into little pictures, at the back of the scene, under the bridge, the green of the trees had grown dark. From the barracks came the mingled sound of shouts of laughter, of bugle calls.

I had a white house, yes, I had. By the side was a great orchard where peaches grew. In the evening Tresa used to come. Beautiful. Her eyes—but he——'

He broke off abruptly, some dark thought flashing through his brain, his eyes were sombre.

Then he grew serene again, bowed deeply, and walked away, singing.

*Amoi, amoi, aécirecheme sa rame "*

After that I saw him very often. When he passed by in the road I always called him to give him something to eat. Once I offered him a few pennies which my mother had given me. He looked very serious, pushed them away with a disdainful gesture and turned his back on me. That evening I met him just outside Porta Nuova. Coming up to him, I said:

*Cincinnatus, forgive me!*

He fled like a tracked animal, and was lost among the trees. But the next morning he was waiting for me at my door, and smiling boldly, held out to me a fine bunch of marguerites. His eyes were wet and his lips trembled, poor Cincinnatus!

Another time, towards the last days of August, we were both sitting at the end of the avenue when the sun had already gone to rest behind the mountains. Over the vast, sleeping plain

you could hear from time to time voices and indistinguishable sounds far, far away. The dark fringe of the pine wood stretched out towards the sea, the moon, shaded like copper, rose slowly up the sky among fantastic clouds.

He looked at the moon, murmuring in a childlike way: "Look, now you can see it and now you can't see it. Now you can see it, now you can't see it."

For a moment he considered.

"The moon. It has eyes and a nose and a mouth like a human being. And who knows what it is thinking about, who knows . . . ?"

He began to hum a song from Castellamare, a song with long, sad cadence, such as are heard in our hills in the flaming nights of autumn, after the vintage. From afar off we could see approaching quickly through the dusk the two lamps of an engine, looking like the two staring eyes of some monster. The train passed, rumbling and puffing out smoke, emitting its sharpest whistle as it crossed the iron bridge. Then silence returned to the vast and shadowed land.

Cincinnatus had risen to his feet.

"Go, go, go," he cried. "Far away, far away, black, long like a dragon, with the fire inside you that the devil put there."

I shall always have clear before my imagination the way he stood at that moment.

The train's sudden eruption into the profound silence of nature had arrested him. All the way home he was dreaming.

One beautiful afternoon in September we went down to the sea. The infinite expanse of deep blue water stood out against the opalescent horizon, shining as with lacquer, the fishing barks were sailing in pairs; they seemed like great birds of some unknown species, with their yellow and vermilion wings. Along the shore behind us lay the tawny sandhills; then to the rear again the sea-green mass of the willow plantation.

"The sea, huge, blue!" he said softly, as if speaking to himself, in accents of wonder and fear. "Huge, huge, and there are fishes who eat men. There is Orcus in his cage of iron; he is there shouting, but no one hears, and he can never come out. At night the ship goes by, which means death to any one who sees it."

Then he stopped. He went down on the shore, so that the tiny white waves bathed his feet. Who can tell what passed

through his poor, sick mind? He perceived snatches of far-off shining worlds, he saw sheaths of colour, something vast, limitless, mysterious, his reason, following after these vain shadows, lost itself

His disconnected phrases, almost always picturesque, allowed one to guess that much

As we were coming home, he kept silence most of the way I looked at him and my heart said many strange things

"You have a mother in your house, who waits for you and kisses you," he whispered at last in a low voice, as he took my hand

The sun was going down in a clear sky behind the mountains, and the river was full of reflections

'And you, where is yours?' I asked, the tears ready to fall from my eyes

He saw two sparrows in the road, he picked up a stone, aimed as if he had had a gun in his hand, and flung it far The sparrows flew like arrows

Fly! fly!' he cried, watching their flight into the pearly sky and laughing aloud "Fly! fly!"

For many days I had noticed a change in him He seemed to be full of fever He would race across the fields like a colt until he fell breathless to the earth, or would lie for hours curled up on the ground, motionless, his eyes fixed in the glare of the burning midday sun Towards evening he would throw his red cloak over his shoulders and promenade up and down the piazza with long, slow steps, like a Spanish grandee He avoided me, bringing me neither poppies nor marguerites, and I suffered from his neglect The gossips declared he had bewitched me One morning, however, I went determinedly to meet him He did not raise his eyes, and he blushed red as fire

What is the matter?" I cried, excited

'Nothing'

"It is not true"

"Nothing"

"It is not true"

I saw that he was looking past me with flame in his eyes I turned Standing on the threshold of a shop was a fine peasant girl

"Tresa!" murmured Cincinnatus, growing pale I under

stood. The wretched man imagined that in this girl he had found again the siren from his own land, she who had already confounded his reason!

Two days later they met in the piazza. He came smiling to her, and whispered:

"You are more beautiful than the sun!"

And she slapped him full in the face.

There were some urchins near, who began to mock and jeer at Cincinnatus, left there alone, thunderstruck, white as a sheet. Cabbage-stalks began to fly; one caught him in the face. He turned on the boys, roaring like a wounded bull, and, catching up one of them, flung him to the ground as if he had been a bale of rags.

I saw him pass under my windows, between two policemen, handcuffed, with the blood pouring down his beard, bent, vanquished, trembling, while the people jeered. I watched, with my eyes full of tears.

As luck would have it, the boy escaped with a few bruises, and Cincinnatus was out of prison again in a day or two.

Poor Cincinnatus, he was unrecognizable! He had become sombre, suspicious, angry. I saw him sometimes, of an evening, slinking as fast as he could go, like a dog, down some dark and dirty little back way.

Then, one lovely morning in October, full of cobalt blue and sunshine, they found him on the railway line by the bridge, so mutilated that he was nothing but a mass of bleeding flesh. One leg, struck right off, had been dragged by the train wheels for twenty paces or more. From the chinless head, with the blood matted in the hair, two greenish eyes stared terrifyingly.

Poor Cincinnatus! He had wanted to see from near by the monster that goes on and on—as he used to say—far, far away, the monster long like a dragon which has fire inside put there by the devil.

## THE FIRE-BRIGADE

ADOLFO ALBERTAZZI

THE fire-brigade of Rivabassa needed only two things in order to prove themselves a perfectly disciplined and well trained body of men ready for all emergencies and these were a pump and a fire. Not that they possessed extinguishers or motor fire-engine or folding ladders no, at that time class rivalry had not yet taught people to claim their equal share of good and evil, and a village like Rivabassa could not allow itself the luxury of having either fires or instruments as good as those of the town. All the same, even Rivabassa possessed hatchets ropes of various thicknesses, a book ladder, another shorter ladder, helmets and official rosettes, a trumpet, and, more than these, willingness, a military discipline, unbounded courage, and an ambition that was heroic. The firemen were, in private life, carpenters, blacksmiths, bricklayers, cobblers sturdy, generous hearted drinkers, especially on the afternoons of Sundays and other holidays.

And Gigi Gamba was in command. He was a sight not to be missed, this first-class book keeper, bursting with ideas and a desire for progress, when he was practising his men in their manoeuvres and directing their attack on an imaginary fire! Short, thin, yellowish, he would take up the pose of a Napoleon—a medieval Napoleon who would enjoy scaling a fortress wall or rather a modern one content with a job in the fire-brigade. Up with you! Let down the ropes! Bring down the wounded—careful! Hack off that beam! Point the hose over there! Turn on the hydrant!”

The only thing was that they had neither hose nor hydrant. Finally, Gamba heard one day that the National Petroleum Company wished to sell a pump in good condition previous to buying another more powerful one he made haste to go and inspect it, right up among the mountains. He saw it draw petroleum from a well, and realized at once that, place it on a cart with a hose attached, and it would, under his guidance,

work to perfection. With the permission of the municipal authorities he acquired it at a most moderate price: he even obtained, in addition to the suction pipe, twenty yards of ordinary hose. A bargain!

Now there was merely the fire to wait for.

It came only too soon, when the pump, having been adapted to its new function, had been tried out but once by the mechanic, and then without water.

This worried no one, all the more because it happened to be on a Sunday, after vespers. The firemen were occupied in drinking and gambling in the various hostelrys, when suddenly—Boom, boom, boom! the bell tolling! fire!—and leaping to their feet they rushed out.

"Teobaldo's is on fire!" cried the street urchins. And off they went at a run to the other end of the village, where Teobaldo, a dealer in coal and firewood, had his store, the Casaccia. The street was already blocked with women and others returning home after the Benediction: all were talking at the tops of their voices.

"Teobaldo! The Casaccia! Gracious goodness! What a fire! The damage! What a disaster!"

And they urged each other on to go and take a look over there.

"Make room, stand aside! Here come the firemen with their pump!"

The firemen, indeed, arrived with a great deal of trumpet-blowing, their leader directing them: most of them were running. Behind the others came Buzzula, tall and thin, silent and unexcited as usual, though he had had more than a bottle, and Sandro, the blacksmith, who was dawdling along in no great hurry.

Meanwhile, heavy dark smoke was pushing its way out through the window of the store and rising in sluggish waves that gradually thinned to yellowish and ashy hues. But Teobaldo himself was not present. He had gone to a distant fair. Poor Teobaldo!

"Connect the hydrant with that well," ordered Gigi Gamba, pointing to the house opposite.

But there, owing to the July drought, there was no water.

"Try Cardí's," someone suggested.

"Cardí's, then," the commandant repeated, annoyed at being offered advice. But it was true that Signor Cardí's well, a little farther on, was fed by abundant and unfailing springs of

pure water, so that one may say the whole countryside used it.

They dragged the pump there put one of the pipes in the water and turned the other towards the fire. Alas! a hose of twenty yards could not cover a distance of over thirty.

"It doesn't matter! The jet will get there!" exclaimed the commandant, more annoyed than ever. "Aim at the windows," he ordered. "Raise the pipe! Pump!"

Right! And on the crowd of spectators descended a fierce and unexpected and well-distributed, soaking, sopping, streaming shower.

Cries and oaths and curses and protests proved that the pump was in splendid working order.

It doesn't reach. Sandro the blacksmith pointed out (he held the position of sergeant).

"It doesn't matter," yelled Gigi Gamba, angrier than ever. So they continued to water the roadway.

Poor Teobaldo!

But the Napoleon of firemen, with folded arms, was thinking. Where was the greatest danger? To the left of the Casacca from which the smoke was escaping, was the new house of the retired officer of the town planning survey, to the right the groom's shed, a hay loft with a small, low room underneath. The entrance consisted of two wooden pilasters supporting a cross beam: there was the greatest danger. And, as a matter of fact, the groom, who had nothing to fear for himself or his family, his house and stable being in a hamlet some way off, was calling out:

Save me!

And his wife was urging that the big jar which she kept under the porch should be protected from the flames, as if it was a question of her mother's and sisters' safety.

Get the ladder ready!"

As the pump was useless, the commandant had decided on a new course of action. He ordered five or six men up the longer ladder among whom was Buzzola the carpenter, drunk but calm to cut down the roof of the loft, and he sent four or five others up the short ladder to throw the hay down into the street.

Signor Livetti, the retired official from the town planning survey, was returning from his usual walk to the Capuchin monastery, when he thought he saw, when he did in fact see,

a column of smoke away at the other end of the village. "It must be the furnace," he thought. But the smoke increased and spread: it was a house on fire. The old man felt a tightening at his heart, and asked himself anxiously: "Can it be my house?"

Now that he led a contented life—he had his pension, was a widower, and the owner of a pretty villa aptly called the Palazzina—he suffered from a terror of fire; this, his only anxiety, embittered the calm of his last years.

Of what use was the insurance? Even if it had been no trouble to replace the house, the loss of his possessions would have caused him irreparable damage. Everything in the Palazzina had been gradually acquired at the cost of many a sacrifice, and was as dear to him as the creatures of his own flesh and blood. Everything, from the furniture and trinkets in the drawing-room to the 'cello he played for recreation, from the sideboard ornamented with mirrors in the dining-room to his books in the study (including an illustrated edition of *The Three Musketeers*).

All his blood rushed to his head, then he turned very pale and began to run as fast as he could, for a treacherous voice within him answered: "Yes, yes, it is certainly *your* house." One man, seeing him running, cried out: "It's in your direction all right." Another encouraged him: "Don't alarm yourself, Signor Livetti! The firemen are there with their engine!" Another: "It is the Casaccia, not your house, that is burning!"

Gracious! The Casaccia was next door to himself! . . . He continued to sprint like a youngster. When he had passed the crowd and the pile of hay in the middle of the road, through the smoke he caught sight of the firemen on the roof of the hay-loft, dealing vigorous blows up there as if they were cutting the air in pieces, while the commandant below was watching them at their work.

"Lieutenant," asked Livetti, turning to Gamba, with what breath was left to him, "is there any danger? Am I in danger?" Gigi did not reply. He was watching and thinking. The poor man was afraid he had made a mistake in his mode of address, and corrected himself:

"Captain, am I in danger?"

No reply. The commandant was thinking: "Why waste time and labour attacking the roof and emptying the loft?" This roof rested on the hay-loft, and the loft on the room below. But remove the two poles or pilasters of the doorway, and would

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not the whole construction fall to the ground? The fire on that side would have nothing to get hold of.

"Sergeant!"

Sancho came up and listened with approval to his orders. Resting the shorter ladder against the pilasters he went up it, and began unnauling them from the cross beam.

The ropes here!"

Two thick ropes were attached to the tops of the pilasters. The trumpet was blown and the new orders sung out "Down below every one! To the ropes!"

Only Buzzula the carpenter seemed not to have heard, and continued cutting at the air. It was so pleasant up there! The particular fire that was within him added the illusion of an agreeable equilibrium, a wondrous tranquillity. He was not the one to be afraid. Not a cry, not a shudder. But he was obedient. On the repetition of the order "Come along! Down with you," he announced, "Coming," and started off along the roof at a good pace with his axe over his shoulder.

The only thing was that he set off by a route directly contrary to that which he had taken on the way up, boldly and confidently he proceeded convinced that he was walking along an uninterrupted and level road until the ground fell away from under his feet. He had not even realized that he needed wings, he had not yet said to himself in his calm way, "Let us fly, then" when axe on shoulder, down he fell down from the roof on to the fig tree in the yard, which received him unshakably in its open arms.

Meanwhile his companions, not seeing him, imagined that he had got down by the other ladder, and since the commandant desired them to pull at the ropes, they did their duty, and pulled.

Each post gave a crack, then—pull!—they gave way, separated themselves from the cross beam, and the whole shed collapsed with a terrific crash in a heap of debris.

Well done. The big jar was smashed to pieces under the falling beams and bricks and tiles while the hay that had not been removed was buried in a mixture of stones and dust. But the operation had been successful. Neither hay loft nor porch could now catch fire because they were no longer in existence.

Then Gar Gamba, with his usual self-possession and his usual thought for the future called out

"Signor Livetti!"

"Is there danger?"

"Don't you see all the smoke?"

The smoke had decreased, but no one was aware of the fact; and if the fire had nothing further to do on one side, it was reasonable to suppose that it might turn its attention to the other. With equal discipline and an undiminished spirit of self-sacrifice the firemen directed their efforts, according to orders, to the left-hand side of the Casaccia. Some climbed on to the roof of the Palazzina and recommenced their wielding of axes; others went indoors with the old man in order to save his belongings. Open the windows; out with everything that comes to hand! And they tossed and threw and hurled out into the street every single thing they could find.

They began with the drawing-room; out with stools and chairs and ornaments (in the street, on the pavement, on the stones!). Next the bedroom: mattresses, washstand, everything! Then the study: the 'cello (in the street, on the stones!), the books (*The Three Musketeers*). The dining-room next. . . .

In vain did Signor Livetti beseech them with clasped hands, running about everywhere like a youngster: "Enough, enough! For God's sake, don't save anything else! But what are you doing? Help! Are you mad?"

The others replied with conviction: "We are doing our duty."

The fulfilment of one's duty is so difficult that it often seems the work of a madman.

In the dining-room, after the chairs had gone, they seized upon the sideboard, ornamented with mirrors. . . .

Luckily the sergeant of police now returned with a companion from a tour of inspection. Seeing the confusion, he was seized with the remarkable idea of leaning in through the window of the store. He looked round, and through the thinning smoke could see nothing but a small heap of glowing embers. That was all. No blaze, no flames: just the dying embers.

"It is over," shouted the sergeant.

Even the chief of the fire-brigade had to admit that, deprived of fuel, the fire had, one might say, been got under.

Better so. It was time to rest.

The trumpet sounded a general rally; and all the firemen with the exception of Buzzula retired in file with their pump to the station. They were weary but content.

Now it was, however, that the victims of the disaster vented their woes on the sergeant and his companion. The retired

official shed big round tears, and in the bitterness of his heart poured forth streams of abuse which he had not employed for twenty years and used to apply only to the head of his department and the ministers 'Rogues' Brigands' Assassins!' he moaned

The groom promised to murder all and sundry, asking who would make him a new hut? who would compensate him for his ruined hay?

As if this did not suffice, his wife demanded her jar, otherwise, she swore, she would tear the heart out of whoever had broken it. She forgot that the firemen were nine or ten in number and that she would have to tear out a dozen hearts, a somewhat difficult enterprise

As if even this did not suffice, the groom's son, who already showed a budding talent for rodomontade, threatened to knife Buzzula because in his fall he had squashed all the ripe figs and knocked the others off the tree

'All this is nothing' said a tall, grave-looking gentleman with a white beard, who had just come up 'Sergeant, there is something far more important.'

The sergeant recognized Signor Cardì, the owner of the well fed by abundant and unfailing springs of pure water, behind him stood three women, chattering like geese, each carrying a pail of water

'Would you like a drink, sergeant?'

'Drink!' said the sergeant to his companion, who took off his cap and approached his lips to the pail 'Puh! What a stink of petroleum! Filthy!'

The sergeant himself thought it was his duty to smell, and exclaimed severely

'The well must be emptied'

'And who will pay for that?' yelled Signor Cardì in a sudden passion

'And who's going to pay for these?' A fury, who had just come up, was brandishing something long and dark. Instead of being thankful that her husband had not broken his collar bone in his terrific fall or cut himself to pieces with his axe, but was in bed safe and sound, and calm as ever, sleeping off his drunkenness, Buzzula's wife—for it was she—clamorously waved his trousers, torn to tatters by the branches of the fig tree. For several years her husband had worn them every Sunday, but she shrieked out 'A new pair of trousers! Oh, look at the

state they 're in now! They were absolutely new; and who's going to pay for them?"

But, to increase the confusion, last of all appears the dealer Teobaldo. Returning from the fair, he had heard on the road that his Casaccia was burning; and from the depths of his heart he had rejoiced. When he reached the village, he saw only too clearly that the Casaccia was as he had left it at his departure; and now he covered the firemen with the most disgusting and obscene abuse, that would have disgraced a fish-market, and accused them of having ruined him. The sergeant, hearing him, imagined that he had lost a fortune in the flames, and asked:

"What had you got in there?"

"Nothing," replied Teobaldo, shrugging his shoulders. "A few bundles of sticks and three sacks of coal-dust."

"What are you worrying about, then?"

"Oh, I know what I know."

Certain things are not good to tell. He had insured the Casaccia for ten thousand lire—it may have cost him at most four thousand. For some time he had wanted a good fire. And he sincerely believed that the firemen had saved it!

But for this—no, no—the firemen deserved neither praise nor blame

## THE SHOES

GRAZIA DELEDDA

It often happened now that Elia Carà had nothing to do, for times were bad, folk hesitated about going to law, and even people like famous barristers and emeritus professors and retired government officials had to work as simple attorneys. But even when he had no cases, Elia used to go to the Law Courts all the same, settle down in the waiting room, and there, leaning his note-book on his knee or on the wall, he would write poems in dialect to his wife. The storm raged around him. The crowd surged hither and thither, poor women, who had come about a matter of a few pence, shouted abuse at each other as solemn and tragic as if they had the whole world to divide. Swindlers, perfectly ready to swear they owed nothing to their own creditors, went by with their heads in the air and their chests thrust forward proudly, the solicitors, poorer than their own clients, went round from one to the other wondering how they could manage to get hold of a sheet of stamped paper. Elia took it all very calmly. He wrote, in his old fashioned verse, which he dedicated to his wife

Su mundu lu cunnosco e donzi cosa  
Chi succedit succedere deviat

I know what the world is like, and I know that everything that happens was destined to happen. I am a poet and a philosopher. Nothing ever surprises me in this world. Life is a see saw, one day up and the next day down, and the next day up again. Do not despair, my golden lily. Perhaps Uncle Agostino, who has driven his wife out of the house and disinherited her, will remember us one day. Then we will go to the seaside together, we will watch the boats in the distance, and hold hands like a honeymoon couple. And, after all, we too are happy now, peace and love reign in our dwellings, and

thou, Cedar of Lebanon, *Venus hermosa*, art my riches and my queen. . . ."

One winter morning, a carter slapped Elia heavily on the shoulder with a hand that felt like stone.

"Run, man! I've just been to Terranova with a load of rubbish, and I saw the carrier, your Uncle Agostino. He's dangerously ill. . . ."

Elia stood up calmly and smoothed his grey hair with his hand as a sign of grief.

"I will go and tell my wife the sad news at once."

His wife did not seem much disturbed by the sad news; she did not even get up from the doorstep where she was sitting, trying to get warm in the sun. She was respectably dressed, wore shoes, and had her hair done in the latest fashion; but her worn, frayed frock, her old shoes, and thin hair framing her dead-white, anæmic face like a halo, only served to show off her poverty more clearly. Her great eyes, which had once seemed so dark, were now a kind of golden hazel-colour, and indifferent and staring, like the eyes of a hare.

From inside the house, where the two occupied one little ground-floor room giving on to the yard, came a noise like the noise of the Law Courts. It was the owners of the house quarrelling, while in the public-house that belonged to them, men were playing *morra* and laughing.

Elia's wife behaved like her husband in the Law Courts—inert, and indifferent to what went on around her. He loved her and wanted her just like that.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" he asked, stroking her hair and looking up at the sky. "I'm going."

"Where?"

"Where? But haven't you been listening? To Uncle Agostino's, of course. It's fine to-day," he added, without saying all that he was thinking; but his wife must have guessed because she looked down at his shoes, which were worn and full of holes, and asked:

"What about money for the journey?"

"I've got enough. Never you mind about me, don't worry. In this world everything is bound to go all right in the end, if only you take things calmly and sensibly; the only thing that really matters is being fond of people and treating them kindly. I was just thinking about that sort of thing this morning; here . . . would you like to read it?"

He tore the sheet off his pad and blushed as he shyly let it drop into her lap. It was all he left her in the way of provisions while he was away.

He set off on foot. He had only three lire in the world, and he was much too wise to lose time by trying to borrow money for the journey.

He was however used to this sort of thing, he never expected anything to help him apart from his philosophical calm and his Uncle Agosino's will. He was an excellent walker, and though far more about his shoes than about his feet, if matters went as well as he expected then everything would be mended in due course.

Matters went well as far as Orosci. The road was downhill all the way, smooth and straight, accompanied, preceded, and followed by the most beautiful scenery, the very sight of it made one forget all earthly cares and troubles. It was like travelling in an enchanted land: the sun like a great diamond, shed its cold pure lustre around the rocks and the grass were glistening. Then as he went farther down, Elia felt the sun grow warmer and more golden and at last, on the marble background of hills towards the sea, he saw, as in spring, pink almond blossom in flower.

But the sun went down with cruel suddenness, after a short spell of twilight the cold night fell, and Elia felt his feet were getting wet. His shoes had given way. This was obviously one of the things that were destined to happen but all the same he did not accept it with his usual philosophical calm. He could not possibly mend them or get someone to lend him a pair now. It was very uncomfortable walking with holes in one's shoes and dreadfully lacking in dignity, moreover, to appear at one's uncle's house looking like a beggar. For the sake of the future for his wife's health and well being he must get hold of a pair of shoes at all costs. The question was, how? Elia had not the slightest idea. And, meanwhile, he reached the village.

The streets were dark and swept by sea wind, not a soul was astir. Only on the piazza a tiny inn shed a hospitable light. Elia went in and asked for a night's lodging, he paid in advance and was given a bed in a dirty looking room where two other wayfarers were asleep. One of them was snoring like Pluto. Elia lay down with his clothes on, but he could not get to sleep,

he saw endless rows of shoes along all the streets in the world, among houses, and out in the fields; wherever there was a man, there was a pair of shoes. A great many pairs were hidden away in drawers and cupboards and all sorts of odd corners; others stood at the end of their master's bed, watching over his sleep; others were waiting outside doors, and there were still others, like his own, that shared the poverty and despair of their wearers. . . .

The roaring of the wind outside, and the snoring of the man beside him, made an accompaniment to his obsession. The hours went by; a star rose in the heavens, delicately blue as if steeped in the waters of the sea, and stopped outside the rattling window-panes. Elia thought of his wife, and the poems he wrote for her, and the easy life they would both lead if only Uncle Agostino left them all his belongings. . . .

He got up and bent over, trembling, to take the snoring man's shoes. They were heavy; their worn nails felt cold against his hot fingers. He put them down, and groped about on the floor to find the other man's shoes, but he found nothing.

Then he heard a vague noise in the corridor, like the steps of unshod feet. He stopped there motionless, crouching down with his hands on the floor, and trembling like a frightened animal. He realized to the full the extent of his degradation; an instinctive sadness, like the sorrow of a heart in danger, weighed heavily upon him. But as soon as the noise had stopped, he went out to the door to see there was no one there; and by the light of a tiny lamp at the end of the passage he saw a cat rubbing itself against the wall with its tail in the air, and a pair of elastic-sided shoes by the door beside it, throwing a shadow on the floor like two great hooks.

He took them, hid them under his cloak, and went downstairs. A man was sleeping on a mat in the yard so as to watch over people's horses; the big gates were just closed with a latch. Elia managed to get away quietly, and found himself on the sea front, by the grey sea under the twinkling stars that seemed to wish to fall down from the sky, lower and lower. . . .

"It's odd, how everything in man and nature has a tendency to fall," mused Elia, walking quickly with the wind across the dark, hollow land, the dark mountains, and the grey sea.

After walking half an hour or so, he decided it was the moment to put on the stolen shoes. He sat down on a milestone, put on the shoes, and felt them critically. He was delighted; they were

soft and roomy, but as he bent down over them he felt the sense of degradation suddenly overwhelm him again.

What if they follow me? A pretty figure I'll cut then.

Whatever will my wife say! While you're about it, Elia Carai, you might just as well steal a million lire as a pair of shoes.

Then 'A million lire!' The question is where to find them then I'd take them at once, he added, laughing at himself stretching out his feet and wriggling his toes about inside his shoes. It was an odd thing, but his feet burned and throbbed and seemed to have a violent objection to being inside those shoes.

When he started walking back, with his own shoes under his arm so that he could put them on quickly and throw away the other pair if by any chance he was being followed, he found he could not walk anything like as quickly as before. His legs shook and he stopped every now and then, seeming to hear steps coming up behind him.

Dawn rose from the pale sea behind a veil of mist, and terrified him like a ghost. Now the people he had met on the road to Croci could see him quite well and when they reached the village and heard the story of the stolen shoes they would be able to say: 'Yes, I met a man who looked rather a suspicious character; he had a sort of parcel thing under his cloak.'

As a matter of fact he did meet a peasant, walking quiet and dark through the dawn with a knapsack and a stick, and Elia imagined he turned round to look at him and smiled.

Day was breaking, sad and grey, the clouds like great, black, tangled skeins, ran from mountain to sea, from sea to mountain, clinging to cliffs and rocks that unravelled them a little. And the crows cawed as they passed over the wind-swept moorlands.

The quiet landscape of the day before seemed to have disappeared; now everything looked tortured and diabolical, and Elia thought he could hear voices in the distance, the voices of people following and mocking him.

At last he put on his old shoes again and left the others by the roadside, but still he found no peace. Fantastic happenings went on in his mind, one of the two poor travellers he had slept with was on the same road and picked up the shoes, then this man was followed and found out and pronounced guilty and let in for goodness knows how many awful punishments. Or else the people he imagined were after him found the stolen

shoes, and went on tormenting him and tormenting him until finally in great shame he confessed what he had done. What would his wife say? The idea grew in his childish mind, excited by exhaustion, cold, and hunger, and spread like the great clouds in the stormy winter sky. He wished he had never set out at all, and had not forsaken his usual peace and quiet merely to run after a shadow. His uncle's legacy would probably involve endless worries and complications; and meanwhile, he had completely disgraced himself.

He turned back, found the shoes where he had left them, and stood a long while looking at them sheepishly. He wondered what he had better do. If he hid them or buried them, it did not alter the fact that they had been stolen. He had stolen them; and the thought of that moment when he was on all-fours on the floor, trembling like a frightened animal, would cast its shadow over his whole existence.

He hid the stolen shoes under his cloak again and went back to the village, lingering on the way so as not to get there before evening. He had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, and felt so weak that the wind made him sway like a blade of grass. He arrived at the inn in a dream, ready to confess what he had done; but everything was quiet, no one mentioned the theft or bothered about him or his cloak in the least. He had supper and asked for a bed; he was given the same one as on the previous night. He put back the shoes where he had found them and then went to sleep. His sleep was heavy as death; he had to be woken up and told it was twelve o'clock. He bought a loaf of bread with the penny he had left, and went on his way again.

The weather was fine again now, and the moors, shut in between the dark mountains and the blue sea, had all the sorrowful enchantment of a primitive landscape; everything was green and strong, but, just as you see in certain human lives, it seemed as if no flowers could ever bloom there.

Elia was walking well, in spite of his old shoes; and because of them, he enjoyed the privilege of being treated everywhere as a tramp, and given milk and bread to eat.

When he arrived, he found his uncle had died a few hours previously. The maid looked at Elia rather suspiciously, and asked:

"Are you really his nephew? Then why didn't you come sooner?"

Ela did not answer

"The master was expecting you He sent a wire to you three days ago He always used to say you were his only relative, but that you 'd forgotten all about him So this morning, when he saw you hadn't come, he decided to leave everything to the sailors' orphans "

Ela went home and found his wife still sitting there in the sun, pale and indifferent to everything

Why on earth didn't you say I'd already gone, when the telegram came, my good woman?"

But surely you'd have got there anyhow, wouldn't you? Why did you take such a long time?"

Ela did not answer

## THE HARE

GRAZIA DELEDDA

A LITTLE island rose up in the middle of a broad river; and in the middle of that island shone a tiny lake, or pool, rather, of greenish silver, surrounded by poplars and willows, bushes of wild acacia, and tall, soft, velvety grasses studded with strange purple sunflowers. Reflected in this little pool, all nature, as in a picture, appeared more fair and more fantastic.

By day, the background of autumn sky, with its changing tints and capricious clouds; by night, the great, ruddy moon and brilliant stars, the quivering ghosts of the poplars reflected in the lake's deep mirror, gave the place an air of romance.

One evening the hunter, who had moored his boat on the fragile shores of the deserted island, and left a trail of stealthy footprints in the untouched sand, saw the great, ruddy moon appear through the poplars, and then again, more lovely than before, in the waters of the little pool. He stopped for a moment, his eyes fixed on the luminous water-picture, enchanted by the unknown world and the far-off mysterious sky, that had appeared, as it were, in the heart of the earth itself. An old hare, that lived among the acacias on the bank, saw the dark man, her terrible enemy; and she fled, light and long and silent, with her ears stiff and straight like knives ready to defend her.

The man lingered with his dreams; the hare lost hers, but saved her skin. When she had reached the depths of the wood, she crouched down under a dark bush, and waited a long time, listening, sniffing the air with her tiny trembling nose. And her heart beat wildly; for months and months it had not beat so hard.

Indeed, after the recent floods, when all the hares in the island had disappeared, shot, or caught by fishermen, or swept away by the raging river, the old hare had imagined she was sole mistress of the place, and had dreamed of living there, alone and quiet, all the rest of her days. She was old and tired and lonely. Her children had abandoned her; and the males

no longer desired her. She might as well stay quietly in a lonely corner of the island, without fear and without peril.

In springtime, when the floods were on, she had lived among some tree trunks that had been washed up on to the high bank above the little pool. No one cared to cross the island's marshy desert, and even afterwards, when the sand hardened and the grass had grown on the banks of the pool, neither huntsmen nor fishermen visited the island.

Silence and solitude. Only the nightingales, in the tall poplar trees, sang their burden to the rustle of leaves that greeted the running water. And the leaves, said, bated in the still moonlight.

'Water, farewell, it is better to run than to stand still.'

And the water answered, hurrying towards the sea.

Farewell, it is better to stand still than to run and run for ever.

And the old hare listened. She was happy indeed, she felt stronger than the trees and fleetier than the water, for she had the satisfaction of being able to stand still or run at will.

The months passed, the nightingales were silent, and the poplar leaves began to fall. The old hare had never felt so quiet and secure in her life before, and now, all of a sudden, this ghastly dark phantom had come back again. And why had he come back?

She lay huddled under the bushes, her great eyes motionless under their reddish lids. She could see in the distance a stretch of moonlit sand, bounded by thicket, a kind of open piazza where she too, in the happy days of her youth, had leapt and pursued her own shadow or waited for her lover on nights when the moon shone bright.

One shadow moved on the sand, and then another. The old hare thought she must be dreaming. But the shadows came back, stopped and resumed their fantastic sporting. There was no doubt about it, they were two hares. And then the old creature understood why her dark enemy, the hunter by night, had come again to the island.

Then a fierce anger, as fierce as a hare's can be, burnt anew in her heart. Instead of convincing herself that she had made a mistake in remaining all by herself in the island, she imagined that her fellow-creatures had taken possession of her island without having any right to do so.

Age and solitude had made her wild and selfish. She was

far more angry at the appearance of the hares than at that of her dark enemy; when she ventured out of her hiding-place, moved towards the sandy clearing, and noticed that the two hares were lovers, her anger became more violent and more intense than ever.

This did not prevent the two hares going on playing and leaping and running together. The female was plump; her almost transparent ears were pink inside and tawny without. She was a flirtatious little creature; she kept running round the male and pretending not to see him, then lying flat on the sand; and when her lover came near she leaped up and ran away. The male, on the other hand, was thin and worn with passion and delight; he had eyes for no one but her, he pursued her and flung himself upon her relentlessly. They were happy—gay and carefree, like all happy lovers.

The old hare did not tire of looking at them; and even when the charming pair, tired of their frolics and their fondling, disappeared from the clearing, she stayed huddled there watching, her ears erect and quivering like two dry leaves in the wind.

The nights and days went by, the moon waned, and the evenings were dark again.

The old hare did not go back to the banks of the pool. She was afraid of the hunter. She lay hid in the darkest depths of the wood, and only sometimes ventured to the clearing by night, to see the two lovers sporting gaily together.

Then one day she heard a gun-shot, then another, then others again, distant and vague, like a far-off echo calling.

And that night, although it was a true lovers' night, soft and warm, with the new moon sinking behind the naked poplar trees, the two lovers did not appear again.

The dark enemy must have seized them. The old hare was so overcome by her fierce, triumphant joy that she began leaping about on the sand, which still bore the footprints of the poor lovers.

But the sound of human footsteps made her take to flight. Blind and panting, she shot through the wood, and almost reached the other bank of the river, where she lay hidden till dawn in a place she had never been in before.

At dawn she stirred. The wood lay veiled in mist; the bushes dripped with great drops of icy water. The hare went out to reconnoitre; she went down into a sort of little hollow, and

there she discovered something which could not fail to move and touch her, although she was so uncharitable. She found a nest of young leverets. There were two of them, plump little things, with transparent ears and great, motionless, shining eyes. They must be the family of the two hares that the hunter had killed.

One of the leverets was licking his brother's head and ears, when he saw the old hare, he looked at her, put out his nose, and then drew it back, rather scared at his daring.

The old hare went on her way, but she came back again later on, and saw the two poor little leverets playing and licking each other.

It was a sad, cold day, towards evening it began to rain, and the old hare went back to her former nest among the tree trunks, up on the high bank of the pool. It rained and rained, but the old hare did not feel any the sadder. On the contrary, rain meant the end of fine weather, and consequent security and solitude. Soon the sand would be soft again, and no hunter could venture to cross the damp, bare woods.

And what about the poor leverets? What would happen to them down in their little hollow? Did the solitary old hare remember her own little ones, the warmth of their nest, and the joys of parenthood? It is difficult to say, but at any rate she left her hiding place at dawn and went down to see the leverets again. The poor little creatures were asleep, one on top of the other, but even in their sleep they must have been expecting their mother, for when the old hare came up to them they stretched out their noses and shook their little ears.

And the old hare looked at them with her great, moist eyes, and she too stretched out her nose, as if she were sniffing the smell of the nest.

It began to rain again. For eight days and eight nights a grey veil of mist and rain encircled and covered the island. The pool seemed filled with black, shimmering ink, and the water rose and rose till it almost touched the old hare's refuge. She had tried to go back and see the leverets again, but near her refuge the sand had given way in several places, and it was all saturated with water. It was quite impossible to reach the little valley. It rained and rained, and there was a sullen noise in the distance like the sound of a hostile army of invaders passing through the land and destroying everything.

The old hare knew that sound well; it was the deep voice of the conquering river. She did not dare to leave her lair, although she was tormented by hunger and had nothing but a few dry leaves to eat. One day she had to remain without food because the water reached right up to the tree-trunks, and it was dangerous to move at all.

The water rose and rose, grey and dark and silent. Earth and air and sky all seemed one mass of cold and turbid water.

But on the evening of the eighth day the rain ceased, and all at once came a break in the clouds. Here and there, through the ashen mist, the pale green sky appeared, and in a breach in the clouds, and in the depths of a mine, shone the silvery gold of the moon.

The waters fell; they seemed to retreat, tired of conquest, bearing away a booty of leaves and branches and sand and dead creatures.

Next day the sun shone on the devastated place, and the poor, wet, famished hare left her hiding-place, and warmed herself, and looked around.

The pool had disappeared; a slow, muddy stream went by under the high bank that had stood out like a dyke; and the water still bore away its booty and its victims.

And suddenly, among the bare branches and the dry leaves and a myriad little bubbles like the beads of a broken necklace, the hare saw the two little leverets, dead, long, and thin; with their eyes wide open and their ears erect they ran and ran on the water, one close to the other, like two good little brothers who loved each other even after death.

Now the old hare really was alone in the island.

# MALGARI

A FOGAZZARO

HUNDREDS and hundreds of years ago, an old poet, king of a far-off country, wandered by the seashore and made a beautiful song. And the song he made moved him so deeply that he wept at his own words, till his tears fell into the ocean and there became pearls.

Now, three hundred years ago, a fisherman recovered the most beautiful of these pearls, it was shaped like a heart, and the Doge of Venice gave it to the Lady Contarina Contarini, whose husband was one of the chief men of the republic.

The Lady Contarina was lovely, rich, and virtuous, but she was nevertheless not happy, for, three years after her marriage, she had lost her only child. At the time this story (which is perhaps more true than probable) begins, twelve years had elapsed since the child's death, and she and her husband had given up all hope that God might send them another little girl.

One day, on her way to church, as Contarina was getting out of her gondola in the Campo San Zanicolo a poor woman came up with her two miserable, ragged children, and asked for money. When Contarina gave her a sovereign the poor woman said, overwhelmed with gratitude:

'May God bless your ladyship and all your people too, I'm sure! May Our Lady give you joy!'

Soon Contarina reached San Zanicolo. There a monk was engaged in preaching a sermon on education, and just happened to be telling his congregation about the Roman matron Cornelia who said of her children: 'These are my jewels.' And Contarina thought: 'Oh if only I still had my little girl instead of the pearl the Doge has given me!'

After church, Contarina went back by gondola to her palace in the Madonna dell'Orto. On the way she fell asleep and had a dream, in which she seemed to hear a voice speak words whose meaning she could not understand: "If you do not wish to lose her, beware of poetry and music."

When she reached the palace, she heard a great uproar of servants quarrelling. They rushed up to her, shouting all together at the top of their voices, and through the noise she managed to make out that they were all accusing each other of having left the street-door open. *Someone* must have left it open, because someone must have come in and deposited a child there; they had heard it crying, and finally found it all alone in her ladyship's room, right in the silver cradle, if you please, that had been empty for twelve years.

Contarina gave a little cry, brushed every one aside with a motion of her hand, and rushed into her room. There in the cradle she found a little girl as white as alabaster, whose eyes were deep and blue as the sea. When Contarina came in, the child stopped crying and held out its little hands expectantly. Contarina went over to the closet where she kept her jewels, and looked inside; the closet door was open and the Doge's gift had vanished. Then she understood how God had read her thoughts, and had answered the prayer of the poor beggar woman.

Wild with joy, she dressed the baby up in the clothes of her own dead child, and then sent for her husband. She told him the whole story—what the beggar had said, her own thought, and finally the miracle.

Her husband, Giovanni Contarini, said he supposed some thief had gone off with the pearl and left the child behind instead, but since his wife was so delighted, he was quite willing to adopt the child as his own.

It was the feast of Saint Margaret, whose name means "a pearl." But when the child began to talk, she always called herself "Málgari" instead of Margaret, and finally the name stuck.

Málgari grew big and strong; she would have been the loveliest child in Venice if only she had not been so extraordinarily pale. The servants at the Contarnis', and the jealous Venetian ladies, used to say it was because of her gipsy blood; but Málgari's features were so delicate and refined, and her voice so sweet, that such gossip seemed perfectly ridiculous.

She was a sensitive child. Usually she was gay, playing about all day long and breaking into happy, rippling, silvery laughter; but whenever she heard any abuse or rough words, or noticed a cruel deed, or whenever she was told about the unhappiness or

misery of other people she became grave and sad and withdrew into her own silence. And this happened above all when she heard people tell lies in her presence.

One summer night when she was four years old she heard someone going down the Madonna dell'Orto canal, singing softly and accompanying himself on the guitar. Málgarì, who was sleeping with her mother, jumped out of bed and crept to the window and there she stayed till the voice faded away in the distance towards Sant'Alvise then she fell fainting to the ground.

When she came to herself in her mother's bed she besought Contarina to let her go to the window and hear the song again. Then she fell into a burning fever and for three days and nights she was delirious always returning to the same subject that she was being called that she must go away that she was not Venetian and that she had heard the call of her own country and she kept kissing poor Contarina and beseeching her 'Mother mother take me away.'

Then Contarina remembered the words she had heard in her dream and decided that since it would be quite impossible to prevent the child hearing music (if not poetry as well) in Venice she would suggest to her husband that they should leave Venice and go to Syra one of the Greek islands which belonged to them and where they had a palace. It stood among groves of olive and orange and laurel and looked towards the sea. The island was uninhabited except for the peasants who looked after the palace gardens.

Contarina said it was a ridiculous idea and that he could not possibly leave Venice. His wife insisted however, and finally set off with Málgarì alone.

Strict orders were given that none of the inhabitants of Syra were to sing or to play on any musical instrument whatsoever. Contarina even prevented the church bells being rung since on the very evening she had reached the island Málgarì had been very much upset at hearing the Ave Maria's lonely sound amid the wailing of wind and sea.

But nothing could restore Málgarì to her former gaiety and spirit. She rarely played and hardly ever laughed but still she seemed pleased at being surrounded by the sea and spent long hours on the seashore listening to the solemn voice of the Ægean.

As she grew older she became more and more devoted to

reading. She used to spend hours in the palace library, and one day her mother found her there, reading Tasso. The poetry she was reading had made her feverish with excitement, her eyes bright, and her cheeks aflame. So Contarina had all the poetry-books removed from the library and burnt.

Contarini himself only came to Syra once or twice in the year, and never stayed more than three days. At first he was very much annoyed at what he called his wife's madness, but finally he got used to the idea.

Málgari was secretly miserable when she noticed that her father and mother no longer loved each other, and she entreated her mother several times to take her back to Venice. She still knew nothing about the secret of her birth, or why they had left Venice so suddenly; she merely supposed it was because of some childish whim of hers one day when she was ill. But her mother besought her not to insist, first with kisses and caresses and then with tears.

One day, when Málgari was almost thirteen, a maid who had been dismissed, and felt spiteful towards the family, told her how thieves and gipsies had introduced her into the Contarinis' household. Málgari shuddered and turned whiter than any pearl; then to the maid she said, "I forgive you," and went straight to her mother. There she insisted on hearing the whole story, as proud and inflexible as a little queen.

Contarina told her about the miracle, trembling as she spoke; and Málgari's lovely, pale face became transfigured, as if dawn had sprung there. "Oh, mother," she said, "I am sure I'm not a gipsy, I know I am the pearl; but you mustn't tell any one—not even the air, or it might stain me; not even the sea, or it might seize me. Now tell me, mother, why won't you let any one here sing or play? and why didn't you let me go on reading that lovely book?"

Contarina answered evasively, and Málgari did not press the matter further. She merely kissed her mother and whispered into her ear:

"But I want to go back to Venice. . . ."

That same evening Málgari went down to the sea, to a lonely creek shut in by two dark masses of rock, where the sea sleeps softly on the smooth, bright sand, and great pines stand above the laurels, whispering at every breath of the passing wind that stirs them.

Malgari felt she had never loved the sea so much. She sank down on to the sand and stretched her body out where the waves could touch her and let them bathe her from head to foot, gently. And the sea was so warm and loving and tender that Malgari spoke to it softly, imagining the time when she was a pearl. She poured out her heart entreating her mother the sea for a breath of that sweetness she had tasted first one night in Venice and again one day in the library when she had sat reading the story of Clorinda and Tancredi!

And the sea answered softly and seemed to hold out the promise of this beauty this and greater beauty yet. The sky grew dark and the deep sea darkened beneath it, and gradually Malgari (she did not know whether she was asleep or awake) saw a myriad little silver lights moving towards her from the distance. Then she saw that each light was a tiny human face, there were thousands of girls' heads dark and fair, breaking the phosphorescent waters thousands of tiny hands splashing jewelled spray to right and to left of them.

They did not actually come up the creek where Malgari lay watching but flashed by so close to it that their phosphorescent brilliance lit up the rocks and the wooded shore beyond. As they went by each little head turned to look at Malgari but not a single one stopped or came towards her until the last one of all she swung round among the rocks and came into the calm water where she stopped a foot or two away from the shore.

Who are you? Malgari asked.

Nereids.

Nereids? Why you can foretell the future, then?

Yes.

Tell me mine.

The little nereid looked at her for a moment before answering.

You were born of poetry and music, and to poetry and music you will return.

The nereid's face was delicately moulded, like that of a little girl but she had beautiful sad deep eyes like a woman of thirty.

You lovely thing said Malgari. Come here and kiss me.

I cannot nereids may never touch the shore.

Shall we ever meet again?

I am of the sea said the sad little dark nereid, but you are of the sky. And without stopping to say good bye, she

turned quickly and disappeared behind a rock to join her sisters again.

Málgari went home. She did not mention the nereid, but never again did she ask Contarina why poetry and music were forbidden.

After that evening she never laughed again, and as time went on she became still gentler and more devout.

Whenever any one in the island was in need or trouble, Málgari took a part in their suffering, and gave them freely of her sympathy and help. She found her way to the people's hearts as well as to their homes, and left light and comfort behind her wherever she went.

In the evening she often used to go back to the lonely creek; but she never saw the nereids again.

When she was fifteen years old, her face and her tall, graceful figure would have made any one take her for eighteen, and Contarina began to wonder whether she would look out for a husband for her now, or wait.

It was two years now since Giovanni Contarini had been near them. He only wrote very seldom, never more than once every two months, when a ship belonging to the Borsari, who were merchants on the Rialto, touched at the island on the way to Smyrna.

But one day the ship brought no letter, only the sad news that Venice was being swept by a terrible epidemic of plague.

The news filled Contarina with concern. She was terribly anxious about her husband, and was filled with remorse thinking of how he might be stricken with plague and she not there to nurse him. But she was even more concerned when Málgari declared, in her quiet, decided way, that it was clearly their duty to go back to Venice, and that duty must be fulfilled.

Contarina acquiesced, as she would have done in the will of God, and a fortnight later she and her daughter reached their palace in the Madonna dell' Orto, where Giovanni Contarini had died of plague the day before.

Contarina was heartbroken; she wept bitterly, and proposed to Málgari that they should leave Venice immediately. But the girl, who had never wept or complained, said that if Contarini had died forsaken by his family, obviously the fault was theirs and they must atone for it. As for her, she declared, she was going to nurse those who were stricken with the plague.

Contarina felt her courage fail her, but she did not dare oppose her daughter, for Málgarì had spoken like a queen and like a saint.

Málgarì began work at once. The sick people had often been forsaken by their relations, who were afraid of catching plague, and dragged themselves out into the roads to die.

Málgarì with her unearthly beauty and sweet voice, and her gentle hand that could turn to any task without disdain, was worshipped and blessed by rich and poor alike. They called her the Madonna dell' Orto, Our Lady of the Garden.

Among others, she looked after a young musician, a stranger who had left his home in the north and come to Italy for the sake of his art. He was a poor, handsome, and noble youth, and as he got better he fell passionately in love with Málgarì, but he was never able to declare his love because she, feeling vaguely that she might have loved him and yet this was not the moment for falling in love, suddenly gave up her visits.

When the plague was over, she still thought of him, and thought of him often, but she did not meet him again.

The Senate gave Málgarì her due of honours, while the Doge paid her the highest compliment of all by asking for her hand.

In spite of her own fears, and Málgarì's chilly refusal, Contarina felt it would be unwise to deny the Doge his pleasure. But Málgarì was obstinate in her decision, and it was only for a joke she added that if he gave a dowry to every poor girl, and an annuity to every beggar in Venice, she might reconsider the question, and if he had the Campanile (which she could not bear) removed from the Piazza San Marco, then she would definitely marry him.

The Doge replied that he accepted the first two conditions, and that he would carry out the third when they had been married three years.

Then Málgarì was very unhappy because, if she now went back on her word, she would be depriving thousands of people of the necessities of life, but the idea of accepting revolted her. However, she believed it would be right to sacrifice herself, and she therefore made the sacrifice.

To put off the evil day, at the last moment she asked if the wedding ceremony could be performed on the island of Syra. The Doge consented, so the betrothed couple set off on two of

the republic's ships, accompanied by their parents and a great crowd of friends and servants and vassals.

It was full moon, and the month was August. On the second night of the journey, about one o'clock in the morning, Málgari went up on deck alone to enjoy the moonlight and fresh breezes of the wonderful summer night. She sat by the prow, gazing at the sea; then after a while she noticed one of the sailors, who evidently wished to speak to her but did not dare.

She asked him gently what he wanted of her. He revealed himself as the young musician, the stranger whom she had nursed through the plague. Málgari was very much disturbed at what she heard, but she did not ask him why he was on board her vessel under that disguise. He merely told her he had been very much grieved when she left him so suddenly, and that now he was delighted to be able to thank her for her kindness.

For the first time in her life, a faint flush passed unperceived over Málgari's cheek; but she said nothing, and let the subject lapse.

In answer to her questions, the young stranger began to tell her about his own country. It was a far country in northern lands, bounded by a sea of summer storms and icy winters—a gloomy, barren country of rocks and lakes and birch woods, whose bark is turned into bread in years of famine; a country of good and simple folk, fishermen who go on the lakes in canoes hollowed out of pine trunks, seeking for trout under the spray of waterfalls; huntsmen who follow the wild duck to the seashore, and in their swift sledges hunt foxes and wolves and bears. "It is a country poor in gold," the youth concluded, "but rich in the most beautiful things in the world—music and poetry."

"But—how do you mean? What makes you say that?" she exclaimed.

Then the young stranger told her of the great saga of his country, which the peasants still sang round the hearth in winter, and in summer in the open on the flowery banks of the lakes or by the seashore. And he told her the most beautiful parts of this great poem, tales of love and hatred, tales of war and peace. And finally he told her the story of an old poet king who sang by the seashore; and the song he made moved him so deeply that he wept at his own words till his tears fell into the ocean and there became pearls.

Málgari was sitting back to the moon, which lit up the

stranger's face she followed his story with eager, wide-open eyes clasping her hands to her breast full of love and sorrow

Why haven't I seen you before? she whispered when his tale was done

And as soon as she had spoken she was sorry for what she had said and turned to gaze silently on the sea And suddenly not far away she saw the silvery currents move in the waters and the little heads of the nereids dark heads and fair

Malgari thought she recognized her own nereid, the only one who turned to look at the ship she thought she met her glance and understood its meaning

Sing me the old poet's song she said suddenly to the youth beside her

He went off and fetched his instrument an Italian violin

Thank you Malgari said when he returned War's a moment I don't want to be seen if they come and look for me

And she slipped down between the cannon on the prow and the ship's parapet to listen

Patriot and artist and lover the stranger played his divine music and all his soul flowed through his playing

The dolphins enraptured followed the ship The sailors and officers servants and masters all came rushing up to hear the magic sounds but the youth did not notice them for a long time As soon as he realized there were people there he broke off and wanted to take leave of Malgari, but all he found was a handkerchief wet with her tears

People imagined that not wanting to marry the Doge she had thrown herself overboard

Contarina Contarini died of a broken heart when she saw her daughter had become a pearl again in the depths of the Adriatic But we know better than to entertain these sad and stupid theories We know that the pearl was born of tears and the soul of a poet and that is why all that remained of Malgari was a handkerchief wet with tears And we know, too what the sad little nereid said

I am of the sea and you are of the sky

## THE LOST DAY

GIOVANNI PAPINI

I KNOW a good many lovely old princesses, but they are all so poor that they can hardly afford one little maid in black, and have to live in Tuscany in some tumble-down country house, one of those secret houses where two dusty cypresses stand guard over a gate in the high wall.

If ever you should meet one of these princesses at the house of a dowager countess whose receptions are no longer fashionable, call her "Highness," and speak to her in French--the cosmopolitan, classical, colourless sort of French you can learn in L'Abbé Marmontel's *Contes d'Isorau*, and which is spoken by *gens de qualité*. My princesses nearly always answer with polite profusion, and when you have succeeded in penetrating their poor little souls (souls as little and dusty and full of pretty trifles as a seventeenth-century chapel), you will come to the conclusion that life, after all, is worth living, and that your mother was not as stupid as you might think when she brought you into the world.

What amazing secrets my lovely old princesses have whispered to me! Though they love powder, they love talking even more; and although they are all German (there is only one Russian), the delightful *ancien régime* French still gives me a delicate and unusual emotion, so that my heart flutters, and I confess I sometimes find myself sighing softly as a lover sighs.

One evening, when it was still quite early, I was sitting silent near the oldest and most beautiful of my princesses. We were in the drawing-room of a Tuscan country house; I sat in an Empire chair, near the table, where I had been given a little cup of weak tea.

My princess wore black; her face was covered by a black veil, and her hair (it was white, I knew, and still rather curly) was covered by a black hat. There seemed to be a halo of darkness all around her. I tried to believe that she was nothing but a fantastic creature called up by my imagination; it was

not difficult to believe this because the room was almost dark, a single candle shed a feeble light on her powdered face, the only white thing in the surrounding shadow. Everything else melted into the gloom so that I could imagine I had nothing but a head hanging in front of me detached from its body, and floating a yard or so above the ground.

But the princess began to speak and then all other fancy became impossible. *Ecoutez-donc monsieur*, she said *ce qui m'arriva il y a quarante ans quand j'étais encore assez jeune pour avoir le droit de paraître folle*. And she went on in her quiet little voice telling me another of her innumerable love affairs: a French general had turned actor for her sake and then been murdered one night by a drunken comedian.

But I knew about that kind of thing already. I wanted a stranger more fantastic less likely story. The princess always liked to be polite.

So you must, she said, on my telling you my last secret I have always kept it a secret because it is a far less likely story than any of my other ones. But I know that in a month or two I must die before the winter is out, and I can never be sure of finding another man as interested as you are in absurd sorts of stories. Well this secret began when I was twenty-two. At that time I was the prettiest princess in Vienna—and I hadn't killed my first husband—no that only happened two years later when I fell in love with—but I've told you that story before. *Passons!* Well it happened that at the end of my twenty-second year I had a call from an old gentleman decorated and clean shaven and he asked whether he could speak to me alone for just one moment. As soon as we were alone he said I have a daughter I love very dearly and she is seriously ill. I must give her back life and strength, so I am going round everywhere looking for years of youth to buy or borrow. If you will lend me one year of your life, I will give it back to you day by day before your life is finished. So when you finish your twenty-second year instead of being twenty-three you will skip a year and be twenty-four. But you'll still be so young you will hardly notice the gap, and then of course I'll give you back all your three hundred and sixty-five days right up to the last one two or three at a time so that when you're old you can have back moments of genuine youth a sudden return of freshness and beauty. You must not think I am laughing at you. I am just a poor father who has prayed

God so long and so fervently that a gift is vouchsafed to me which others cannot be given. I have succeeded in collecting three years already, but I need several more. Give me one of yours, and you will surely never be sorry for it!

"I had always been used to strange adventures, and in the almost imperial society in which I moved nothing was really considered impossible. So I agreed to the amazing loan, and in a few days I became a year older. Hardly any one noticed; and until I was forty I went on living perfectly happily without ever wanting back the year that I had given on trust and which was still owing to me.

"The old gentleman had left me his address with the contract. He had asked me always to let him know a month beforehand when I should want a day or a week of my youth back, and he promised that I should always get what I asked for on the appointed day.

"After my fortieth year, when my beauty was beginning to fade, I retired to one of the few castles that still belonged to my family, and only went to Vienna once or twice in the year. I used to write in good time to my old gentleman, and then I used to go to the Court balls in the great houses of the capital, as young and lovely as I had been at twenty-three; and I used to amaze all the people who had seen my beauty fading. How strange the days before my appearance must have been! In the evening I went to bed tired and *faude* and the next morning I woke up gay and light-hearted as a bird that has just learnt to fly, and ran to the looking-glass to see. All my wrinkles had gone, my body was fresh and plump, my hair was golden again, and my lips red—so red that I could have kissed them myself. At Vienna all my admirers came crowding round me, exclaiming at my wonderful beauty and accusing me of witchcraft; but really they had no idea what had really happened. As soon as my little lease of youth was about to elapse, I got back into my carriage and was rushed back to my castle, where I refused to see any one. One day a young Bohemian count, who had fallen violently in love with me when I was in Vienna, managed to get into my room—I can't imagine how he did it—and nearly fainted when he saw how much uglier and older I was (although I was still very much like her) than the woman who had won his heart in the streets of Vienna.

"After that no one ever managed to break into my self-imposed retreat; the terrible course of my hourly decay was only

broken now and then by my rare hours of youth, with their strange joy and awful melancholy. Can you imagine what an odd life I lived—long months of lonely old age interspersed with the thrill of a day or two's beauty and love?

To begin with those three hundred and sixty-five days seemed absolutely inexhaustible and it seemed as if I could never come to the end of them. So I was rather careless about them and wrote too often to my mysterious Debtor of Life. But he is a most terribly accurate person. One day I went to his house and saw all his account books, you know I am by no means the only person he has made this sort of contract with, and I am quite sure he keeps all his accounts most accurately. I saw his daughter too—a very pale creature, sitting on a veranda and all surrounded with flowers.

I have never been able to find out exactly where he gets the life from that he gives back so punctually, in daily instalments, but I rather think he incurs new debts to pay back the old ones. I wonder who the women are who gave him the days he's passed on to me. I should like to know one of them, but I have never been able to find out anything although I've often made discreet inquiries. *Mais, peut être elles ne seraient pas si étranges que je crois.*

At any rate he is a most extraordinarily interesting man and he works out his system beautifully. You can't imagine though how terrible my life became when he told me calmly—like a banker don't you know—that now he only had eleven of my days left. For a whole year I never wrote to him, and once I felt inclined to make him a present of my remaining days and never to bother myself any more worrying about them. I'm sure you know why I felt like that? Every time I became young again the more painful was my reawakening to age, because there was a bigger difference each time between my real age and twenty-three.

But it was impossible to hold out much longer. You don't think surely, that a lonely old woman could ever refuse her privilege of a day or two of beauty and love and charm and joy, now and then? To be loved for a day—desired for an hour—happy for a moment? *Vous êtes trop jeune pour comprendre tout mon ravissement.*

But my days are almost finished—I shall soon close my account for ever. Think I've only one more day to ask for. After that I shall be definitely an old woman consecrated to

death. One day of light, and then everlasting darkness. . . . You see . . . the unexpected tragedy of my life. Before I ask for that one day . . .

"But when shall I ask for it? What shall I do with it? I haven't been young for three whole years, and now hardly any one remembers me at Vienna; my beauty would seem ghostly. . . . But I feel I need a lover, an ardent, passionate lover. . . . I need someone to touch my body and caress it. My poor, wrinkled, old face will be fresh and rosy again, and my lips will breathe desire for the very last time. Poor, pale, cracked lips! They long to be red and warm just once again, only for one day—just for a last lover, for a last kiss!

"But I can't make up my mind! I haven't got the strength of mind to spend the last little penny of my youth—I don't know how to spend it—but I have a wild longing to spend it. . . ."

Poor, charming princess! She had raised her little veil and the tears were making little channels on her powdered face. Her sobs—although she tried to restrain them politely—prevented her going on. Then I felt I must do all I could to console this adorable old lady, and I fell at her feet—the feet of a withered old princess all dressed in black—and assured her that I would love her more ardently than any lover; and I begged her, softly and insistently, to give the last day of her youth to me and to me alone.

I cannot quite remember everything I said, but it must have moved her profoundly, because she promised, rather melodramatically, that in a month's time I might be her last lover—for a day. We agreed to meet at the same house; then I kissed her pale, thin hands, and bade her farewell.

While I was walking back towards the town that night, the moon, not quite full, looked at me persistently, pityingly sarcastic; but I was thinking of my princess so hard that I did not take the moon seriously in the least.

That month was terribly long, quite the longest month in my life. I had promised my future mistress not to try to see her until the appointed day, and I kept my promise faithfully. However, at last the day arrived; it seemed the longest of all that long month. Finally the evening came, and after I had dressed with great care, I set off for the country house, my heart beating and my steps uneasy.

I saw the windows of the house from far off; I had never

seen them so brilliantly lighted. When I got nearer I found the gate open and the balcony heavy with flowers. I went in and through to the drawing room, where all the candles of two elaborate chandeliers were burning.

I was asked to wait, I waited and no one came. The house was perfectly quiet. The lights burned softly and the flowers filled the silence with their perfume. After waiting restlessly for an hour, I could bear it no longer and went into the dining room. The table was laid for two, and there were masses of fruit and flowers. Then I went through into a little drawing room, dimly lit and deserted. At last I came to a door which I knew led into the princess's room. I knocked once or twice, but no one answered. Then I plucked up my courage—I knew a lover can neglect the rules of etiquette—and opened the door, then I stopped on the threshold.

The room was full of beautiful clothes thrown about anyhow, as if the place had been sacked. Four chandeliers threw a strong, flickering light around. The princess was reclining in an arm-chair in front of the mirror, she was wearing one of the loveliest dresses I have ever seen.

I called her, she did not answer.

I went up to her, touched her, but she did not move. Then I noticed that her face was thin and white just as I had always seen it, but perhaps a little more frightened, a little sadder than usual. I put my hand over her mouth, but I could feel no breath, I put it on her breast, but I could feel no heart beat.

The poor princess was dead—she had died, quietly and suddenly while she was in front of the mirror watching her youth coming back.

A letter I found near her on the ground explained her sudden death. There were only a few lines of stiff, military handwriting, which said

MY DEAR PRINCESS

I am extremely sorry. I cannot give you back at once the last day of youth I owe you. I have not been able to find any woman who was sensible enough to believe my almost unbelievable promise and my daughter's life is in danger.

I will do my best however and I will let you know whether I am successful. I should like to be able to satisfy you to the last.

Believe me

Yours sincerely

The signature was illegible

## THE ENEMY

CAROLA PROSPERI

He was sitting in his study by the window, with his elbows on the table and a cigar in his mouth, staring vacantly in front of him, when his wife called from outside the door:

"Pietro, can I come in? I've something very important to tell you."

No answer came; so she waited a moment, and then insisted: "Please, just for one minute. It's terribly important; I must tell you."

She opened the door, peeped in with a shy little smile of excuse, and came forward on tiptoe:

"You have been smoking a lot! You know it isn't good for you. . . . Why are you sitting in the dark?"

She waved her handkerchief about to disperse the smoke, and as she moved, her silk dress made a light rustling noise, and her diamond ear-rings sparkled in the shadow. It was her At Home day, that was why she was so smart.

He sighed a deep sigh of exasperation, got up, switched on the light, and remained standing. He looked at his wife with a cold, almost disgusted stare; his lips contracted into a forced, disagreeable smile, and he dilated his nostrils, a habit he had whenever he was going to say something cutting.

"Why on earth do you do your hair like that at your age?" Her lips trembled, and her eyes in her pale, tired, but still attractive face, turned red and filled with tears, like the eyes of a child. She began making excuses:

"My hair never stays tidy unless I have it waved sometimes. One must look tidy, after all, when people come."

"Oh, indeed!" he exclaimed with sarcastic seriousness. "Of course, to-day's your Great Day. The bell never stops ringing——"

"Well, listen," she said, coming closer to him, forgiving and smiling again; she almost looked triumphant. "Who do you

think called to-day? Signora Salvetti, Guido Salvetti's mother. The barrister Salvetti, you know who I mean——"

No, I don't," he interrupted drily, making an effort not to appear in the least interested.

Surely you remember him, the barrister, you know, such a nice looking young man, with such beautiful manners!

I'm sorry I don't remember any such paragon.

As a matter of fact he remembered the young man perfectly well but nothing on earth would make him admit that he did.

"Well, never mind," said his wife sweetly. "I'm sure you'll remember him again as soon as you see him. The whole point is that his mother talked to me most enthusiastically about Elena, and how fond her son is of her, and they're all so pleased about it, and—well, you see, Pietro, they want her as a daughter in law, that's what it comes to. She asked if her husband could come round in two or three days' time and ask you officially. I said yes——"

Oh, you said yes, did you?"

Pietro darling, there couldn't be a better match. And then Elena's really in love with him——"

Elena's really in love with him, is she?"

He spoke coldly and deliberately, opening and closing his lips with great emphasis, as if he were extracting and tasting and enjoying all the bitterness his irony contained. Then suddenly he burst out furiously, in fierce, disjointed sentences.

And how has Elena managed to fall in love with him? Where did they see each other, I should like to know? And you—you're not much of a mother to have let this sort of thing happen. You've allowed your daughter to fall in love with a man I don't even know! I expect they've been writing to each other, too. You're always in the clouds, you never notice anything. Or perhaps you've been encouraging their correspondence, have you?"

She covered her face with her hands, and sitting there on the sofa, she wept quietly, shaking her head, and blurting out through her sobs.

I thought you'd be so pleased, I thought you'd be like me, Pietro! Why are you like that? Why? What have we done that's wrong? There's nothing strange about it—two young people liking each other and then falling in love! Why, didn't we do exactly the same thing, Pietro? You are unjust, you really are."

Indeed he was unjust. He was sitting down too, now, and hung his head, which felt heavy as lead, on his breast. He felt a dull, aching burning, like a wound inflamed; his limbs were consumed, his joints gave way beneath him as if he had experienced some overwhelming bodily fatigue. This sort of physical depression invariably followed his violent bouts of anger, and at those times his conscience cried aloud and tormented him as implacably as his tired nerves tormented him. It was perfectly true that he had fallen in love with Clelia. He had desired her and asked her hand, trembling as he did so; he had married her in great exultation. It was an old, old story now, long, long ago, twenty-five years and more; but it was none the less true for being old. Even if Clelia was middle-aged now, her waist no longer slender, and her hair turning grey, with wrinkled cheeks and tired, tearworn eyes; even if he himself at fifty was as old as a man of seventy, still the young remained, the young who were beginning to love and who seemed to believe there was nothing else worth thinking of but love. He was unjust, indeed.

He made a vague gesture with his hand, and spoke in a broken voice:

"Clelia, my nerves . . . we'll talk about it another time. . . ."

Signora Clelia wiped her eyes, left the room quietly, and went to tell her daughter the result of the interview. She told her that her father had been rather annoyed, and had made a bit of a fuss, but that he would certainly come round all right in the end. Only, for goodness' sake, don't say anything. Father is so nervous, he mustn't be disturbed. As soon as she had said that, Francesco, the eldest son, who had been playing the piano, stopped and got up from his seat; Luciana stopped her game; and Beppino recited his lesson in a whisper. Even the maid began laying the table very, very softly, going about the room on tiptoe so as not to disturb her master. But through the actual meal it was hopeless trying to quell the children's obvious high spirits. Elena could hardly eat; she kept making nervous little movements of hands and face that gave her away completely; and her beauty (she was like her mother, but with something bolder and more conscious about her charm) seemed to glow with an inner light. Once she dropped her fork, and Beppino, who was picking it up under the table, burst out into a clear, contagious laugh. Luciana began laughing, then Francesco laughed too, and Signora Clelia smiled as well in sheer childish delight. Then Pietro, on purpose to stop the

laughter, that disgusted him and made him furious, turned to his wife, and said in an icy voice

'I am going to Falconetto to-morrow Will you see about my suitcase?'

"Oh!"

She looked at him, as if in a dream, and then at Elena, who turned white as a sheet, with her eyes flashing But when Pietro looked round, every member of the family had its head down except Beppino, the youngest, whose face shone with innocent delight—the delight of a schoolboy expecting a holiday

Pietro held up his finger

"So you're pleased your father's going away, eh?"

The boy turned scarlet, as if caught in the act, he made a face and bit his lip so as not to burst out crying

'No, really, father, really——'

Pietro was not listening He had got up, and his wife was asking him in a whisper

'You're coming back soon, aren't you? You must think about that thing——'

'What thing?'

"Why, Elena's marriage, of course! Your going away would look very much like a negative answer—a refusal—an insult, almost After all, your daughter's happiness is at stake, it's much more important than anything there is to do at Falconetto"

But what she said only made him more obstinate than ever

"Of course, when you women get ideas about love into your heads, nothing else matters, not business or anything"

As a matter of fact he had nothing in the way of business at Falconetto at all, he did not even want to go there particularly It was only an inordinate desire to make people suffer that drove him there in spite of everything

"Pietro, don't go"

He did not even answer When he reached the door, he turned round and saw they were all sitting there in silence, without even looking at him And his conscience cried out "Look what you've turned your family into, your beloved family—a band of terror-struck slaves"

He left for Falconetto next morning

Falconetto was not only his country house, it was also his ancestral home, where his grandparents and parents had spent

the greater part of their lives. Standing there, in the desolate countryside, cold and shuttered and still covered with snow, the old house looked like a tomb. The peasant woman who looked after the place opened the door, lit a fire in the dining-room and one in Pietro's bedroom on the first floor; and when she had seen his expression, she refrained from asking him too many questions about the family. He looked round vaguely at the fire that had been just lit, the old furniture he knew so well, and the garden, all white through the iron bars of the window; then he sat down heavily in front of the fire, and said to himself:

"Are you pleased now? Just now Clelia is crying, Elena is sobbing, and the children are all delighted you've gone away. They'll be saying: 'It's lovely here without *him*.' *Him*—that's me. That's about it. No one loves me now; they're just terrified of me, and soon they'll hate me. I wonder how long it will be before it gets as far as that?"

He was alone. He felt discouraged, but his nerves were quieter, and now he could force himself to introspection, seeing his faults clearly, measuring their importance and estimating the extent of the evil he had done. Now the hour had come, the hour so much dreaded and so often put off, when he must hear the true and irrevocable judgment pronounced by his conscience, when he must take his whole life, past and present, and spread it before him like a map you unfold and put up on the wall with four drawing-pins. He was to be his own judge, grave and austere. All his past life came back to him. Until forty-five he had been gentle and peaceable, although somewhat inclined to melancholy; he had been a devoted husband, an indulgent father, and calm and ponderous in business matters. Then, gradually, the joy of living seemed to have been sapped within him; the fountain of his goodness had dried up altogether, or else something hard and heavy, like some great stone, must have stopped it and silenced its flowing. A sullen disgust had grown up and filled his whole being, poisoning his human relationships inevitably. He saw everything coloured by this disgust; his nerves were shaken and bruised at the slightest touch. Now everything jarred on him, especially anything to do with his family. His wife's gentleness, and her way of speaking, her obedient glances, her patience when she treated him as if he were ill, her caressing voice, her plump, white, dove-like neck that he used to love so much, now exasperated him dreadfully

whenever he felt annoyed. Anything naughty the children did however small seemed to him enormously important and quite unpardonable and he used to nag at them angrily about it for hours on end. Their cheerfulness irritated him their careless and spontaneous joy made him miserable and filled him with an icy stolid melancholy that repelled both sympathy and understanding. He seemed to grudge them their smiles and laughter and to shudder at their youth. His wife used to say

Pietro's nerves. The children used to say Daddy's nerves. They used to talk of his nerves as if they were evil living creatures livid and gloomy, always on the look out to strangle any happiness that made its way into the house.

And in obedience to these tyrant nerves he systematically refused his children anything they particularly wanted invariably contradicted them, and felt a painful, irresistible impulse to make them suffer whenever possible. In obedience to these tyrant nerves he had left the house that day, spoilt Elena's happiness clouded his wife's joy and refused to see his future son in law.

That was the end of it. He bent over his faults and examined them meticulously like a doctor bending over a wound without flinching at the smell of corruption it gives off. He knew his was an hereditary evil. From the darkest corners of the house rose up the ghosts of his youth to remind him of the story of the past. He saw his family there, his brothers and sisters his mother with her poor thin face tearful but calm the marble calm that sees no hope but death. They used to say Daddy's nerves too and mentioned them as evil living creatures, livid and gloomy filling the whole house. Because of those nerves the elder daughter had made an impossible marriage out of sheer despair just to get out of the house the younger daughter had taken the veil with a doubtful vocation the eldest son had gone abroad without a penny in his pocket, and he Pietro, the youngest had suffered more than any of the others under the weight of this cruel yoke. He remembered one by one all his mother's tears the little, hateful daily persecution, the systematic contradiction and violence from which there was no other refuge than hypocrisy and lying. And hatred towards one's nearest and dearest insatiable selfishness the wild desire to make them suffer shuddering at the sight of joy and an icy, sullen melancholy, repelling pity and repelling understanding.

Perhaps his father had been good and kind too, as a young man. He wondered. Perhaps he loved his family, too, in his own way, bearing the cruel pangs of a pitilessly guilty conscience. Perhaps he, too, had been both martyr and executioner. . . . And Pietro, who had suffered from his captivity to such an extent that he felt he must go mad, often used to say: "If I thought I should ever make my children suffer like that—if ever I have any—I should strangle myself with my own hands." Yes. He really used to speak like that. And he wondered whether his own sons would speak in the same way. The thought beat on his brain, violent and insistent, almost an obsession in its persistence. He must throw it off; he sprang up suddenly, went out into the air, and walked along the lonely ways towards the mountains, on the brink of a yawning precipice. And so he walked all day. When he came home, he hardly touched the food that had been set out for him; and at night he took huge doses of a sleeping-draught that sent him into a deep sleep, dark as death. So two, three, four days passed; then one morning (he woke up towards noon) he went downstairs and found his wife waiting there in the drawing-room. She had arrived an hour or two earlier, but had not dared to wake him. She was pale and anxious, and looked at him with her eyes full of fear; then she murmured:

"I didn't dare to come, but then . . . You're ill, I'm afraid. You're really ill. . . ."

She was filled with alarm at the sight of his face—livid, sleepy, the face of a somnambulist, and his eyes, gleaming in their hollow sockets. He had aged incredibly in those few days. His hair was so white . . . and she began weeping quietly, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Don't cry," he said to her gently, almost tenderly. "What are you crying about? Is every one all right?"

She nodded, and took the handkerchief from her eyes.

"You're not well . . . you ought to come home."

He stared at her dear, sad face, the face of a woman who has never grown old in spite of the years and life and all its hardships; at her clear, kind, mild eyes that he had so often filled with tears, and her dove's neck, bent in gentleness and obedience. He said:

"I ought to go back, for Elena's sake, I know I ought to. But I can't yet . . . I've got things to do . . . and I'm better here. But I'll write a letter if you like, which will do just as well as my presence."

He sat down at his desk, solemnly and deliberately, and wrote a few lines with great care. Then he read them out to his wife

MY DEAR DARLING ELENA

I give my full and unconditional consent and warmest approval to your marriage with Guido Salvetti. My blessings go with you, and my most loving embrace

YOUR FATHER

"Is that right?"

He sounded as if he had read his own will

"That will be enough. Elena is of age, you see."

His wife stared at him in amazement

"Pietro, but you don't see. What about all the other things? The marriage contract, and her dowry, and all the people. You can't refuse to see about all that!"

He looked up trains in the time table, and told her she had better go back by the three o'clock, it was the best of the day, and would get her home early. She looked at him beseechingly

"What about you?"

"I'll see you off at the station."

She put on her hat and furs, quiet and resigned. He said to her, as gently as before

"But you haven't had any lunch, darling."

"Never mind, I'm not hungry. But I'm sure you——"

"No, no, I won't."

They took the longer way to the station. It was intensely cold, and the hard snow crackled where they trod. Now and then he held her up so that she should not slip, and once he had to support her with his arm round her waist. And she, touched by his unwonted kindness, seized his arm, clinging to him and besought him with tears in her eyes

Pietro, come back, do come back with me! Don't make us all unhappy by going away just now."

He went on walking, gently supporting her

"But that's the very reason why I'm not coming back—so as not to make you all unhappy. I must leave you, I must be alone, because I alone must suffer——"

"But where, alone?" she moaned

"Alone—here—or in a monastery—in a hermitage, in the desert, I don't know, but I must be alone. It's not so much for my sake as for yours, don't you see? I want you to be quiet. I want you to be happy——"

"But how can you expect us to be happy under those conditions?"

She wept and began complaining. Why couldn't they live quietly together? They had plenty of money; their children were healthy and good. They knew people who kept having all sorts of misfortunes, children ill, or gamblers, or dissolute; and money worries, and sudden deaths, and accidents; but these people seemed quieter than they did, in spite of it all.

"Every family has its tragedy," he said. "Every one has his cross to bear; with one man it is poverty; with another, vice; with another, disgrace; every one has an enemy in his house. I am the enemy of our family; I have it in me, the evil of my father. You remember, I've often told you about my father and his nerves. I think—may God forgive me—I really hated him. And I'm not ill enough yet not to realize it. I know what I am like, and I don't want my children to come to hate me and the life that I have given them. That's why I say this must be the end of it; I must leave you. I must be the one to deliver you from the enemy. I can only tell you this once, remember. I couldn't another time. Mine is an illness that I know perfectly well; I observed it in my father when I was a boy, and I know it gets worse and worse every day. No, I will not, I will not!"

They were at the station now, a tiny, deserted station; and he stopped talking. She had not understood very well what he meant. She was terrified at his words; Pietro's voice sounded a little mad, somehow. She thought: "I'll send Francesco to persuade him, or Guido, who's a barrister; he speaks so beautifully."

But her aching heart could not hold out against her grief; she embraced her husband, and sobbed and wept bitterly, her head on his shoulder. He had certainly made her suffer atrociously, and their life lately had been almost intolerable because of him, but she could not entertain the idea of leaving him all alone like a dog nobody wants. She remembered their youth together, and their love so long ago—her only love affair—and the story of their marriage and the first years spent together. What a dear companion he had been in those days! He was so tender and loving, so charming, and so much in love! He worshipped her, then. She owed all her past happiness to him, happiness now long past but still sweet and living in her memory.

"Never mind, Pietro! We might quite well be happy again

together, you never know. I'll send Francesco here to see you. He's so kind, you know, and the children are fond of you, too—you're their father, after all, in spite of everything. You can't expect them to want you to stay here all alone, can you?"

She got into the train and made little gestures behind the window, meaning that she intended to send Francesco. But, as she said good bye, her face took on an expression of alarm, as if she had suddenly and instinctively felt she would never see him again.

He turned back slowly, and walked a long, long while, until darkness fell. Francesco would come, he was sure, and beseech him, on his knees perhaps, to come home again. They couldn't leave him alone, he realized that. The feeling they still had for him 'in spite of everything,' as his wife had said, and people, and society conventions, all made it their duty to try and make him come back. If he went back, the enemy would go with him, and then would begin long years of torment for him and all the family. He would impose on his children the same sufferings he had undergone as a child—perhaps worse. He leaned against a tree and raised his weary face to the sky. Why was serenity in this life denied him? There was only one way open to him if he wished to free himself and others from future suffering—the way he was going, a dark, smooth, lonely way, full of gloom, and leading to the yawning precipice. All he had to do was to walk a step or two, hold out his arms, and try to walk on even when he felt the gulf beneath him.

Francesco was just leaving the house to go and fetch his father when a telegram arrived saying that the body had been found two days after the accident.

## POVERTY

FEDERICO TOZZI

LORENZO FONDI looked at his wife's hat on the chest of drawers; it was not pretty, with its faded ribbons, but he was seized with a desire to kiss it. The atmosphere outside was so intensely luminous that it seemed ready to burst into a blaze, and even within the room the glare was blinding. Near the window stood a dusty bench: on it Fondi's unopened books, bought so long ago, just after he had left school, and now fly-blown and dirty; near by his gloves, torn and with the seams all going, left there ever since the winter. His old clothes were hanging from their hooks.

Now Fondi was no longer in love with his wife, and wished to leave her: he had sold a pair of oxen, and with the money that he had received he could even get abroad. He had come to detest the life of a small landholder, the continual worry of bills of exchange and taxes, and then the yearly accounts! His peasants cheated him whenever they could, and his affairs were not going well. He did not exactly know what profession he should have taken up in order to live peacefully: but in any case something would turn up. His father, on the other hand, had been a capable farmer, who had managed to put some money by.

He buttoned up his collar angrily, and cast a half-frightened glance at his new clothes, which he would soon be putting on. Suddenly he stopped and listened, looking at his image in the mirror. The peasants were beginning to thresh the maize with their flails. Oh, he must escape at once, by the train, that very evening: he must, he must! He knotted his scarf round his neck and considered the effect.

Just as he was choosing his least worn-out shoes, his wife Corrada came in. His alarm increased.

"Have you received the money for those two casks of wine from the Signora Viola?"

For answer he shouted out:

"No, I tell you!"

"Well, when will you make up your mind? . . . I must pay the butcher's bill, it's for more than a month now"

He pursed his lips in anger and continued in the same tone

"You must wait"

"But it makes me ashamed!" And a few tears stole down her cheeks "Whenever I pass before his shop, he looks at me as if to say 'When shall I be paid?'"

Corrada could hardly speak Her mouth was horribly twisted with the agony that she was enduring

"You are being a little fool and inventing things Like every one else, he imagines that we are well off And so," he added quickly, half under his breath, "he trusts us No need to worry"

Corrada stopped crying, and clasping her hands, "Where are you going now," she asked, "with your best clothes?"

"Siena I must see the man who bought our hay last year"

Corrada's father had been a clerk She was thin and pale, and her eyes were set in a circle of livid, almost transparent skin She leaned on his shoulder, sighing, and said

"It distresses you to talk of money, but what am I to do?"

He hunched up his shoulder, forcing her to take her hands off him, and replied with a laugh

"Don't talk of it"

Corrada became still paler

"You always say that You're unkind to me"

"And what answer should I give? There is no other reply that one can make, you think that I can pick and choose, perhaps?"

She silently twisted and untwisted her hands he watched her with a sort of contempt, yet felt himself reddening shamefacedly It was unbearable to stand before her like this, like a culprit for at bottom (but without knowing why) he attributed the misery of his condition to his own character

She crossed to the window and leaned her head against the panes nor did she once turn round, until her husband had finished dressing But as he was opening the door, he said

"What will you be doing?"

"To-morrow morning I must send a pair of hens to be sold"

"Ah, so you are going to sell the hens?" replied Lorenzo, for the lack of anything else to say

"Yes If I was not here, you would all be dead of hunger"

Besides, I must settle up with Vittoria, she paid for the anchovies."

"Do not speak so loud, the peasants will hear us."

"I know, I know, there is no need for you to tell me so. You wish to be the only one to shout, the others must not——"

"I may shout, but I do not talk of money." And he stamped his foot.

She reddened a second time, and, feeling herself ready to burst into tears, ran into the next room, wiping her eyes.

"So you have gone at last?"

But, after all, why quarrel with her? He realized that he had been wrong, and knew that intensely, almost unreasonably, he wished her to be happy. But why did she not understand him? He did not know. And why did she not smile instead of always crying?

Suddenly he discovered that he was no longer determined to leave her for ever. He sat down: his forehead was covered with a cold perspiration. He was suffering unspeakably at the thought of his bills of exchange and his debts; he felt his reason tottering. How often, rather than arrange for a new bill of exchange, would he have been willing to fall dead to the ground, strong and healthy as he was, and only twenty-seven years old!

Corrada, on the other hand, had seated herself and was mending a pair of stockings: gradually she ceased crying, although her dress continued to show signs of recent tears. She was not angry with her husband; indeed she regretted having spoken to him as she had. And then she began to think of other things, her hens, her pigeons. . . . She gradually came to feel better, as if rendered calmer by her recent emotion; and she comforted herself with the great love which she bore to her home.

Why, then, were things going badly? They should be all right: she must think about it. She thrust the stockings abruptly into a basket full of reels of cotton, rose, wiped her face with a handkerchief, and went and stared fixedly out of the window. Then, hearing her husband move about, she returned to his room.

"How much will you ask for the hay?"

"I do not know."

"And why not?"

"I do not know what sort of prices are being paid."

"Find out exactly, then, before making your contract."

Even though she was speaking of business matters, her voice preserved a gentle sweetness. He looked up at her, hiding his anger. Just before, had he not thought of taking her by the throat? Now he accepted what she said, but, though unable to leave her, he did not utter a single word. Just then someone knocked at the door.

"Who is it?" she asked.

He experienced his usual suffocating anxiety.

"It is I," said a little girl, his second cousin.

Corrada made her a sign to come farther in, but Lorenzo asked her abruptly, "What do you want?"

"I have a letter."

Corrada took it.

"They are waiting for an answer," the child added, and departed.

On opening it, Corrada became as white as paper, Lorenzo avoided looking at her trembling fingers.

"It is the carpenter's bill."

"How often has he sent it in?"

"This is the fourth time."

"Tell him that I will pay as soon as I have sold the maize. They are threshing it to-day. We shall be able to sell it in a week's time."

"And when will you think of the other things we need? Look at the dress which I have on."

He reddened and slowly bit his underlip. His wife made as if to kiss him, but he put his hand on her breast and pushed her back.

"Go and tell him what I said."

She began to cry again. "Why do you not go? Must I do everything you do not like for you?"

"I do not dislike doing anything," he cried, and added, red with rage, "I must brush my hat now. Tell him to wait. What are you crying for? You must stop, it only makes me angrier, and I am sick of it."

She escaped, slamming the door behind her. Lorenzo reached it at one bound, opened it, cursing, and cried out.

"Why can't you go and die?"

"Why are you like this?" said his mother-in-law, Cesira, who had just come out of her room.

"What does it matter to you? And why do you not pay my bills?"

She became pale and then red.

"You should take things more calmly," she said.

She was a short woman, about forty years old, with a red face; a peasant type.

He crumpled up his hat and spat on his books; bumping into the bench, he knocked it against the wall, and all the books fell to the ground. He took a voluptuous pleasure in this expression of rage. His home, his home! Oh, if the house could be struck by lightning, and shattered to pieces, and his wife, his mother-in-law, his cousin all killed! All! His heart was beating as violently as the peasants' sails outside—more so, perhaps. He took from the drawer the thousand lire he had received for his oxen: a good handful. Then he stopped and listened. His wife was arguing loudly with her mother; her voice was harsh and, nevertheless, more affecting than her tears. He continued to listen. How long was this to last? He must stop her, but could not her mother do anything with her?

He realized that they were not accusing him, but discussing affairs, and they seemed to be in agreement. "Yes," thought he ironically, "put your heads together, you will do better."

"We must find some remedy," his mother-in-law was saying. "We are slipping down towards ruin, as things are."

"Naturally. But how are we to climb up again?"

"Think of the best way."

"I shall ask Lorenzo to take out a mortgage."

"That will make things worse than ever."

"Well?"

"Go and consult a lawyer."

"At once; the time to put some clothes on, and I'll be off into the town."

Her mother added something in a lower voice. Then the door opened and Corrada, half undressed, said:

"I am coming with you."

"What for?"

"That is my business."

"Ah, but I know what you have thought of; and another person, as stupid as yourself, has agreed to it."

"All right. I have just as much right as you to think of such matters. Go and give the carpenter his answer."

Lorenzo went downstairs fuming. The boy who had brought the bill was waiting, leaning on his bicycle.

"Tell your employer that I will come and see him in a few days."

The boy saluted him respectfully and rode off. The maize on the threshing floor was gleaming in the sun. From time to time a hen less timid than the others approached it, stretched out its neck as far as it could, pecked at a grain, ran away to a safe distance before swallowing it, and ended by fluttering its wings.

Ces ra opened her window and called out: Lorenzo!

What is it?

Come here.

He shrugged his shoulders, but he no longer had any desire to leave the house. Rather he realized, with something of the owner's pride, that he would be able to buy again the oxen.

Maria, one of the peasants' daughters, passed near him, smiling, and he felt fascinated by her swelling breasts, never yet restricted by a corset. She entered the house and recommenced her work of sifting; she was covered with flour. He cautiously approached the open door, palled with a desire to take her in his arms, and her smile, her imperative sensual smile, fascinated him more and more. He would doubtless have an opportunity of speaking to her at dusk, in the barn.

I will live here another year! Why my affairs might even have improved by then.

Going upstairs, he saw the cat descending close to the wall and stopped to stroke it.

Why are you so unkind to your wife? said his mother-in-law.

What did I say to her? I was not myself.

Go and find her.

He opened the door contentedly and asked:

Have you really decided to go to Sena?

I should think so. I am not like you, never able to make up your mind.

And having finished dressing, she put on her hat and took up her parasol.

I am to go alone?

Yes, I am staying to watch over the peasants.

She consented happily.

## PICTURES ON SKULLS

MASSIMO BONTENPELLI

HALLSTATT is a famous town among geologists. I had arrived at Hallstatt on a boat, coming from a melancholy and woody spot of the earth that is called Obertraun. It takes twenty-five minutes to go there. During this time my boat was accompanied by a swarm of white butterflies, which, passing through the grey and misty veil coming up from the water, continually go up and down from one shore of the lake to the opposite one, for some mysterious business of their own. From time to time some of them lean on the water to rest; when they do not do this well enough they are drowned.

But all this does not matter at all with my adventure.

The piece of information most necessary to the story is this: Hallstatt is a very small town. It has eight hundred inhabitants. It is not its fault—there is not place for more, because before there is the lake, behind there is the mountain, at once very steep, which protects the town, and suffocates it—as protectors frequently do.

A strip of level ground between the shore of the lake and the foot of the mountain; some other strips, even narrower and shorter, higher up, in some levelled splits of the rock. Then the rock rises without any possibility for men to live on it.

All these strips are in communication with each other—besides the glittering waterfall of Mühlbach—by means of steep paths and narrow steps cut in the rock, just like those that Dante found in Purgatory. There, together with a few houses for the eight hundred inhabitants, have been confined the most important things in social life, namely, a bathing establishment, a church, a museum, and a cemetery. Here we are at the important point.

This cemetery is a miniature one. The guide—a woman—called my attention to the smallness of her cemetery with a

sort of pride. I thought she was proud because few people died at Hallstatt, but it was not for this reason.

"There is no room for all the dead," she explained at once. "And there is no ground available."

"How do you manage, then?"

"Then, when the cemetery is full," and she pointed with her open hand at the garden of crosses and flowers where we, Hamlet like, were passing, "when it is full—and it is so easily filled—we empty it. We take off the old dead and put in the recent dead."

"But, excuse me, what about those that you take off?"

"There," she said, showing me a closed door in the wall that lined a portion of the rocks. The old woman invited me in.

"Do you want to enter?"

She opened the door. At once, on entering a large room, I was struck by a diffuse whitening, full of holes, of shadow and grimaces. I perceived soon that it was a great exhibition of skulls. Skulls and skulls, all white, were orderly disposed in compact files on shelvings, perfectly drawn up like a regiment which has been reviewed, or like the bottles in a wine store. A still and clear population, full of looks.

"We preserve," my guide explained to me, "the skulls of the dead, cleaned to perfection by a special liquid, and we put them there. The head takes little room, and, for a dead man, the head is enough."

A crowd of questions came to my lips, it came out, the most important one, perhaps.

"But the inscriptions?"

"You mean name and surname, for all the rest does not matter."

"Yes."

"The name and surname, look, is on them."

I drew near the skulls. On the forehead of each skull, in fact, were painted in big characters, just above the eye sockets, a name, a surname, and two dates. I noticed, besides, that above the name of the skull I was observing, a green wreath of laurel was painted all round. The same thing on the next two skulls, but on another skull I saw that there was a garland of roses. So all the skulls had a painted wreath of laurel on, or a garland of red roses.

"Those with the laurel," said my guide, "were men; those with the roses were women."

"I ought to have known."

In the centre of all that gathering there was a huge book closed, and on it five or six skulls with laurel and one with roses.

"That book is the Gospel. Those are the heads of friars, and the woman was a nun."

I think I stood with my mouth open. The woman recalled my attention, saying:

"Do you see that one?"

On the skull she was pointing at was painted a snake, instead of the wreath or the garland.

"That man died of the bite of a serpent."

"Apparently," I remarked, "he is neither a man nor a woman."

My guide did not reply. I looked round a little, and then I went out.

While I was going far from that singular place, a thought came upon me:

"If I suddenly died here, they would remove my useless scalp from my forehead and make it white with their special liquid and paint a wreath of laurel round it. All poets ought to come up here to end their days at Hallstatt."

Nevertheless I looked somewhat impatiently at my watch. But there was still time, several hours, before evening, that is, before the departure of the boat.

What shall I do here till this evening?

The devil—who owes me some gratitude for certain defences I pleaded for him—suggested to me a strange idea.

I turned back, found again my guide, and asked her if the man who painted the wreaths and garlands—also, exceptionally, serpents—was at Hallstatt.

The woman pointed out to me a green and white spot at the end of the top strip of the town.

"Yonder is a kitchen garden, and there is the gardener's house. It is he, the painter."

I climbed on steps, lanes, and stones, reached the kitchen garden, and found the painter, who was paring a bunch of salad.

Had I met him in Rome, a ministry clerk, I would have scarcely noticed him, so orderly, commonplace, and calm he looked. Indeed, I did not wonder at him even at Hallstatt:

I have known for a long time that the most wonderful things have sometimes a commonplace and reassuring aspect.

He also was not astonished that I interviewed him.

Both of us sat on a bench near the house entrance in the first shadows of sunset. His replies to my questions first about vegetables and then about skulls were uninteresting, and gave a tone of dullness to everything we spoke about. After ten minutes conversation my mind was deprived of any sense of curiosity. I was no longer able to find anything interesting in that town. Even that funereal custom was nothing exceptional to my mind now and that man's profession now seemed to me to be the most usual as if there were no gardener in the world who did not add something to his scanty earnings painting laurels and roses on the skulls of his unearthed fellow countrymen.

I rose to go away. But I think in that moment the devil appeared invisible by my side and pointing out to me the brow of that man which was high and very white, he suggested a sudden question to me.

Have you never thought—— I began, and then I stopped short.

Of what?"

Now I could not cancel my question. I blushed. The man was waiting for me to continue. I had to rush in my indiscreet speech.

When in a hundred years, you also and sometime afterward to make room for others, also your head will . . . I mean——

I stopped speaking.

An enormous silence full of strange impending things, fell at once from on high and stood between us two. I did not dare to take my looks away from his eyes. Soon in that prodigious silence that divided us I saw his eyes change shape and colour, become wide infinite, lighted from inside by a cold light which spread itself on his whole face. He became unrecognizable from what he had been some minutes before.

His lips quivered. He was going to speak. This movement stirred away the silence that was between us. Then he crossed it also with his hands with which he grasped mine. They were hot. I felt a sense of anguish.

At last his voice reached me and calmed me.

His face was still illumined by that polar light, his hands were

still trembling, but his voice was unchanged and natural as before.

"I have already provided for that," he said.

Now his hands pressed slightly on mine, and then dropped them; I felt a refreshing confidence in him.

"I have already provided for that. You are going away, have you not told me you are?"

"Yes."

"Will you never tell anybody . . .?"

"Upon my word, I will never."

"Come with me, then."

He led me into his house, which was only a kitchen, where was his bed and a small table. He took a key from under his pillow, and casting a suspicious and evil look back, he resolutely opened a cupboard.

He raised an arm, stretched it out, and, taking off a dark cloth he uncovered a nice snow-white skull with the bright, green laurel wreath painted on. There was a name and a surname.

"This is my name," he said. "It is my skull already ready."

I felt myself caught as by the beginning of a mesmeric sleep. With a great effort of my will I succeeded in moving just a little, and tried to see with the tail of my eye if the door had remained open.

I felt he was looking at me, and I looked at him. He waited for some word from me. I glanced at the skull, then, with a new extraordinary effort, I smiled. I succeeded in making a remark:

"There is—only one date."

"My birthday. The other date will be put in by somebody else. It is the least they can do for me."

I felt I must ask him still some questions:

"And—have you found it easy?"

"Easy?" he shouted, "easy? It is an incredible discovery, the result of very long studies! Easy!"

"Excuse me. I meant to say—has it taken a long time?"

He became a little calmer, and with softer voice he began to explain:

"By the secret invented by me it takes three hours. The thing to be done is to take off one's skull endosmotically, and, at the same time, to substitute a fictitious skull for it. It is an operation slightly painful, and it is done by a series of not deep

cuts by means of a special knife—also this, naturally, of my own invention. As I did it on myself, I had to stand before a mirror, I had less comfort and a greater effort was needed. Think only that after the operation, which was perfectly successful, I fell on the ground in a swoon. They found me many hours later, and sent me for a cure, I do not know where. On coming back here I was afraid lest they had lost my skull. Happily it was still here. I have painted it, as you see. Then I began to study again and now I am in a condition to do the operation on anybody with very little pain.

‘And have you—done it on somebody?’

He looked at me bewilderingly and began again to cry.

‘A band of asses! Asses! This is a country of blockheads, cowards, materialists! I have proposed the operation, eight years ago to the mayor—first of all to him, out of regard. I offered to do it free of charge. He began at once to shout and spread the rumour that I was mad. Then I offered it to the curate of the church he excommunicated me. Through the calumnies of these two madmen the town was put against me. I had to say that I had been joking and that I would think no more of it. So I had to keep my sublime invention within myself. Ah! But I have taken my revenge!’

How have you?’

Now he spoke in an undertone.

You are going away, aren't you?’

I hope so.

‘You will never tell anybody?’

‘I swear.

Well both of them died, one six months after the other. When they have unearthed them’ (here the man's voice was still more subdued) ‘I have changed some skulls, and on the mayor's and curate's I have painted roses instead of laurels.’ Here he began to laugh a metallic laugh. ‘Ha, ha, women, they will be women for the whole of eternity!’

A long silence followed during which the tumultuous beats of my heart prevented my brain from finding a way to take leave.

He broke the silence all of a sudden, seizing tightly my arm, nailing his flashing eyes into mine.

‘A foreigner! I need a foreigner! You, you, who are so intelligent. I'll do the operation on you. Yes! I'll do it free of charge. And I will paint your skull at once. You will

“speak about it, afterwards, you will explain that it is true, that it is a great invention.”

“Well—I say——” I muttered.

“You are not going, you too,” he shouted, “to put me in difficulties, are you?” And he shook me violently.

“Certainly not . . . of course! . . . But tell me only . . . Well . . . yes. Is it better to do this wonderful operation when one has an empty stomach or when he has eaten?”

The man seemed struck by this question. He released his grasp a little.

“I believe—yes, certainly, it is better with an empty stomach.”

“What a pity!”

“But why?”

“Because just a little while ago, before coming up here, I had eaten—eaten very much indeed. Had it not been for that, we could do it at once. As it is, we must postpone it until to-morrow morning. What a pity!”

Then he began to pat me sympathetically on my shoulder, to console me.

“Never mind, be patient! You have been like this for so many years, you can wait till to-morrow morning. As soon as the sun rises, you come back here, and I’ll do it at once.”

“All right then, professor.” I had, meanwhile, reached the middle of the room. “All right. I go to sleep, and so to-morrow morning I will come back to you fresh after a good rest.” I was already on the threshold. “Meanwhile, I thank you very much. Till to-morrow! . . .”

So saying, I crossed the small kitchen garden. I rushed down without paying much attention to steps and paths, while the shadows fell lower and lower from the summits of the mountains, wrapping the valley in darkness. The bell of the boat called me, with a voice which sounded as sweet as that of a siren. I think I leaped over hedges, ditches, walls, and buildings of every sort by a miracle. Still panting, I jumped on the landing-board, and reached the boat.

The boat started. It was already night. My heart resumed again its normal beats.

My first thought was: “Who knows if, even at this time of the night, the butterflies go up and down from one shore of the lake to the opposite one for some mysterious business of their own, grazing the water in their flight?”

## THE MAN'S HEART

GIORGIERI-CONTRI

GUGLIELMO heard the bell ring, then someone come in—and talking in the hall. But he did not move. Who could it be? the boy from the chemist's? or the baker? or the maid? He knew all the details of his simple, monotonous life by heart. From up there in his study he could hear the rhythm of things happening every day, a rhythm like the motion of a loom. Even the unaccustomed things that were happening that day assumed in his ears a kind of sound as if he had heard them before and he was not particularly interested. There was the chemist, for instance, he was new, thank God! But why move because of that? He could know nothing, he could do nothing to change the course of events. He mused, thinking to himself: "Soon the midwife, Signora Accardi, will be here. Then the doctor. And then there will be more rings at the bell, and in an hour or two the whole thing will be over."

To hide his anxiety he began reading again, without troubling to look out into the little suburban garden, now green with spring. His study was as modest and limited as his life. He thought about his life, now, as he read. He had married at twenty five, and now he was thirty—five years of colourless existence, neither particularly happy nor particularly unhappy. His mother's unambitious scheme had worked out perfectly, and he had let it work itself out because he was too lazy to assert himself, and he had not much faith, either, in his own qualities or power of achievement. His mother, who entertained the very ordinary ambitions of most middle-aged women, had spoken to him with the cautious, half-disillusioned sort of affection parents do assume, when they seem afraid of their son having at last to face the life into which they brought him, and she had always said: "You marry Irene, she's the wife for you, the only woman you could possibly marry. She isn't pretty, of course, but she is serious and competent. She's

pretty well off, too; not rich; but then you couldn't aim at marrying money. . . . She'll make you a good home and bear you children . . . what more do you want? It is no good fostering illusions about that sort of thing, you know. . . ."

And certainly he never had fostered any illusions. He had married Irene to please his mother, and got used to being happy according to her notion of happiness.

It was a pale, languid sort of happiness, like a sick-nurse in a dream. His mother had known perfectly well what she meant when she had talked about illusions. For Guglielmo, "illusion" meant his cousin Anna, daughter of one of his father's sisters, who had married a rich and canny business man. When Guglielmo was a boy, he had been to their house a great deal; but as he grew older, his aunt's suspicions and the difference in the family fortunes had made a gulf between them, and he gradually left off going there. And this tall, fair girl, always pretty and well-dressed and perfumed, was the "illusion" Guglielmo's mother had fought against. "Whatever could she want with a man like him? Marry him? Good heavens, she'd aim far higher than that. . . . Love him? Didn't he realize she was just flirting and amusing herself, and wasn't really thinking of him a bit?"

Cruelly and persistently, these words had worn away his dream, as a drop of water wears away a stone. And so he had married Irene—and peace. . . .

Now, after years of pale and languid happiness, Irene was about to be delivered of a son. At first Guglielmo could not get up much enthusiasm about it. Now, he supposed, the time had come for him to bring up someone else to beware of illusions. Then, as the months went by, he felt his heart fill with joy, like waters rising and flooding the land. A son; a *raison d'être*; compensation for all his past sorrows and his renunciation of love and happiness as well.

He roused himself this time, left his study, and found himself out in the passage. There was a strong smell of disinfectant coming from his wife's room. If he had listened very, very hard he might perhaps have heard moaning. . . . But a shadow from outside suddenly appeared before him, and a strong, calm voice interrupted his thoughts:

"Here I am, here I am! Got the wind up, eh?"

It was the doctor, an old school friend, who used to come to his house a good deal at one time. He was a fat, jolly, red-

faced man, whose function of bringing new lives into the world seemed somehow to have given him increased vitality

'I came as soon as I could      How is she? Well? Good.  
Don't you be agitated      I should go out, if I were  
you, or else stay quiet in your study      I'll come in an hour or  
two and tell you how we got on''

He laughed and went into the bedroom. Guglielmo went back to his study. For a moment he seriously thought of going out, but then a kind of vague instinct, a mixture of fear and joy, held him back. He wondered whether it was the result of his nervous excitement, or what.

He sat down at his desk again. There all his old thoughts came back to him, as if, just at the moment when his life seemed to be projecting itself forward into the future, with the birth of his child, his actual thoughts perversely delved farther and farther into the past.

The past meant Anna—always Anna—Anna and her name and herself.

He had seen Anna again several times since his marriage. She had never married, she preferred her liberty, she used to say with a laugh. Now she was twenty-seven, she lived alone, travelling a lot, always busy, still as gay and as pretty as ever. She sometimes came to see them and was quiet and friendly with Irene. She did not say much to him—just a smile or two, and she shook his hand in a companionable sort of way. Guglielmo used to think his mother had only been half wrong. Anna might not be over-ambitious, but she certainly was not affectionate.

More people in the hall? Someone was talking to the maid in a low voice. The voice made Guglielmo start. Then his study door opened and a fair head appeared.

It's me Guglielmo. Can I come in?"

He made a helpless gesture on the desk with his hands, as if he would have liked to shut up all his thoughts in a drawer out of the way—the gesture of a guilty man caught in the act. But Anna came up, quiet and unhesitating.

I just came round to inquire. How's Irene?"

Guglielmo looked so absent minded that she looked at him affectionately, and went on.

Poor Guglielmo, you're worried——"

'No,' he murmured, 'the doctor's there.'

And suddenly, the idea of this girl, who was so interested in

an act of love and of life, sprang into his mind, and it disturbed him, for he was careful and clean-minded. He glanced involuntarily at Anna's lovely body, so perfectly adapted to bearing children.

"Sit down a minute, Anna. . . . It is good of you to have come."

His voice sounded strange, like music when the key changes. Anna looked at him in amazement, and for a moment said nothing. Then she asked:

"Do you need anything? Can I be of any use?"

Now it was his turn not to answer. The silence between them widened, like a circle in which they had got lost. Unconsciously both of them seemed to be listening to some other voice, the memory of words once said and now forgotten, or thought and never uttered. And suddenly, Guglielmo broke the silence with a strange question, which seemed stranger still coming from such a shy man; and it touched Anna like a clumsy caress.

"You're so good, Anna. . . . Why haven't you ever got married?"

She blushed violently; her whole face and her bare neck under her fur were scarlet. But she tried to smile, to hide the shadow that darkened her eyes.

"What are you thinking of now, Guglielmo? I've stayed single because—because no one wanted me. . . ."

"Oh!"

Guglielmo laughed heartily, too. No one? Why, she had had more "young men" than all the other girls in the town put together!

"Who told you?"

"Why, my mother."

"Your mother knew nothing whatever about it, poor thing. Well, let's say I made a vow, then," Anna said, still laughing, but obviously rather embarrassed.

"A vow? But when we were children together you always thought the other——"

"One makes vows later on——"

"When was yours?"

"I'm not sure. . . . Oh, about five or six years ago——"

"When I got married, you mean?"

She stopped, more and more embarrassed, and bit her lips; that was a stupid thing she had said.

"Oh, yes," Guglielmo said. "I remember you were ill that year. No one knew what was the matter. I remember—I was in Switzerland with Irene. I only heard about it afterwards. And," he went on with a smile, "was it then you made up your mind?"

"Good bye, Guglielmo," Anna said, shrugging her shoulders. "I'm going now. I'll come back. Ring me up and tell me how things are getting on——"

Yes, of course I will. Aren't you going to shake hands?"

"Here, then."

She held out her hand. He shook it and lingered—quite involuntarily. What was the matter? Why was her hand trembling like that? He pressed it harder, and it seemed (oh, sudden, wild, certain feeling!) as if she yielded herself to him, overcome.

He was alone, amazed and terrified at what he had dared to say and what he had dared to think. He seemed to see truth standing there in front of him and asking "Don't you understand?"

No—he had not understood. He had allowed himself to be led by his mother's blindness, and so he had found himself at the edge of a precipice into which he had inevitably fallen. Now he saw the past in its true light. When he had been often to see Anna, her face lit up and shone, when his visits became few and far between he found her unhappy. Then her illness, and all those years of neglect, when she had obstinately refused to get married to any one else. But then why had she said nothing? Was it wounded pride? Or was she afraid of being snubbed? No, she had not understood either.

And now? This sudden revelation! And her blush, and her trembling hand. Anna still loved him. "No," he said to himself, "it isn't possible." But his heart beat dully within him with the sureness of instinct. It was so, it was so.

A wild shriek of agony interrupted his train of thought, and brought him back to real life again. A child of his, flesh of his flesh, was being born and would continue his life into the future. And he was there, thinking of his vanished happiness, when he had a new joy, his son, beside him! But still the thought of Anna persisted. It seemed to him that these two great joys, one impossible and dead, the other close and almost

certain now, must blend in some way and complete and enrich one another. . . .

"Guglielmo."

The doctor stood before him, pale and agitated. Guglielmo jumped up, and murmured:

"What is it? Is anything the matter?"

"Yes," said the doctor gravely. "She's in danger. There are unexpected complications. There's still hope; but we may have to call in surgical aid. I thought I'd better tell you. . . ."

Guglielmo reeled. He thought of the poor woman there, risking her life in pain and suffering. . . .

"And ask you something," the doctor went on. "Your conscience will tell you what is best to do. If I can only save one of the two, which shall it be—the mother or the child?"

"What?" shouted Guglielmo, pale as death.

"Yes, that's how things stand. Science can save one or the other of them. That I can promise you. But perhaps not both. . . . Think it over and tell me. . . ."

In a flash, Guglielmo saw his new life before him, a life that Fate seemed to promise and hold out as a temptation. A son; his aim in life. Anna; and happiness. Everything would be different; everything would be renewed. Instead of being pale and languid, his happiness would be bright and burning, such as he had often dreamed of. Love for duty, passion for habit. . . . If Irene were to die, then he would marry Anna. . . . He had only to stretch out his hand and choose. Who could blame him? Wasn't he acting according to the laws of life and the necessity of the species?

"God, God!" moaned Guglielmo.

"You don't love your wife," his heart went on speaking, "and you will go on living with a woman who means nothing to you, all alone and without children; and just think how you've lost the other one a second time . . . and all your own fault too. . . . Go on . . . two words . . . is it as hard as all that? Go on, you fool; say the baby."

He raised his head, pale, and said:

"Save the mother!"

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## BIOGRAPHY

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 (See also TRAVEL)  
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 Carlyle's Letters and Speeches of Cromwell. 3 vols. 859-8  
 " Reminiscences. 875  
 (See also ESSAYS and HISTORY)  
 1. Cellini's (Benvenuto) Autobiography. 31  
 Gibber's (Colley) An Apology for his Life. 831  
 Constable (John) Memoirs of. By C. H. Leslie, R.A. 803  
 Cowper (William) Selected Letters of. Intro. by W. Hayley M.A. 774  
 (See also POETRY and DRAMA)  
 De Quincey's Reminiscences of the Lake Poets. Intro. by E. Rieu. 183  
 (See also ESSAYS)  
 De Petz (Cardinal) Memoirs. By himself. 2 vols. 725-6  
 Evelyn's Diary. 3 vols. Introduction by G. W. E. Russell. 770-1  
 1. Forster's Life of Dickens. Intro. by G. K. Chesterton. 3 vols. 151-3  
 (See also FICTION)  
 Fox (George) Journal of. Text revised by Norman Penney F.S.A. Introduction by Rufus M. Jones, LL.D. 746  
 Franklin's (Benjamin) Autobiography. 313  
 Froude's Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield. 888  
 1. Gaskell's (Mrs.) Life of Charlotte Brontë. Intro. by May Sinclair. 315  
 Gibbon (Edward) Autobiography of. Intro. by Oliphant Dineen. 811  
 (See also HISTORY)  
 Gladstone, Life of. By G. W. L. Russell ('Onlooker'). 351  
 Hastings (Warren) Life of. By Capt. L. J. Trotter. 453  
 Helms' (Sir Arthur) Life of Columbus. 332  
 Hodeon, of Hodeon's Haven. By Capt. L. J. Trotter. 401  
 Holmes' Life of Mozart. Introduction by Ernest Newman. 584  
 Houghton's Life and Letters of Keats. Introduction by Robert Lynd. 801  
 Hutchinson (Col.) Memoirs of. Intro. Monograph by F. E. G. Oulton. 317  
 Irving's Life of Mahomet. Introduction by Professor E. V. Arnold. 813  
 Johnson's Lives of the Poets. Intro. by Mrs. Archer-Hind, M.A. 770-1  
 Lamb (Charles) Letters of. 2 vols. 347-8  
 (See also ESSAYS and FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)  
 Lowes' Life of Goethe. Introduction by Havelock Ellis. 743  
 Lincoln (Abraham) Life of. By Henry Bryan Swann. 783  
 (See also ORATORY)  
 Lockhart's Life of Robert Burns. Introduction by E. Rieu. 156  
 1. " Life of Napoleon. 3  
 " Life of Sir Walter Scott (abridged). 85  
 Mazzini Life of. By Bolton King M.A. 804  
 Newcastle (First Duke of) Life of, and other writings by the Duchess of [Newcastle. 717]

## BIOGRAPHY—continued

- Outram (Sir J.), *The Bayard of India*. By Capt. L. J. Trotter. 398  
 Peppy's Diary. Lord Braybrooke's 1854 ed. 2 vols. 53-4  
 Plutarch's Lives of Noble Greeks and Romans. Dryden's Translation. Revised, with Introduction, by Arthur Hugh Clough. 3 vols. 407-9  
 Rousseau, Confessions of. 2 vols. 359-60  
 Scott's Lives of the Novelists. Introduction by George Saintsbury. 331  
 (See also **FICTION** and **POETRY**)  
 Seeborn (Frederic): *The Oxford Reformers*. With a Preface by Hugh E. Seeborn. 665  
 Smeaton's A Life of Shakespeare, with Criticisms of the Plays. 514  
 Southey's Life of Nelson. 62  
 Strickland's Life of Queen Elizabeth. 100  
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 Walpole (Horace), Selected Letters of, intro. by W. Hadley, M.A. 775  
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 Wesley's Journal. 4 vols. Intro. by Rev. F. W. Macdonald. 105-8  
 Woolman's (John) Journal and Other Papers. Introduction by Vida D. Scudder. 402

## CLASSICAL

- Æschylus' Lyrical Dramas*. Translated by Professor J. S. Blackie. 63  
 Aristophanes' *The Frogs, The Clouds, The Thesmophorians*. 516  
 " *The Acharnians, The Knights, and The Birds*. Frere's Translation. Introduction by John P. Mauna. 344  
 Aristotle's Politics. Introduction by A. D. Lindsay. 405  
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 Euripides' Plays in 2 vols. Introduction by V. R. Reynolds. Translated by M. Wodhall and H. Potter, with Shelley's 'Cyclops' and Dean Milman's 'Bacchanals'. 63, 271  
 Herodotus. Rawlinson's Translation. Edited, with Introduction, by E. H. Blakeney, M.A., omitting Translator's Original Essays, and Appendices. 2 vols. 405-6  
 L Homer's *Iliad*. Lord Derby's Translation. 453  
 L " *Odyssey*. William Cowper's Translation. Introduction by Miss F. M. Stawell. 454  
 Horace. Complete Poetical Works. 516  
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 L " *Republic*. Translated, with an Introduction, by A. D. Lindsay. 54  
 Plutarch's *Moralia*. 20 Essays translated by Philemon Holland. 565  
 Sophocles' *Dramas*. Translated by Sir G. Young, Bart. 114  
 Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*. Crawley's Translation. 456  
 L Virgil's *Æneid*. Translated by E. Fairfax-Taylor. 161  
 " *Eclogues and Georgics*. Translated by T. E. Blyds, M.A. 222  
 Xenophon's *Cyropædia*. Translation revised by Miss F. M. Stawell. 672

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 Arnold's (Matthew) *Essays*. Introduction by G. K. Chesterton. 115  
 " " *Study of Celtic Literature, and other Critical Essays, with Supplement by Lord Strangford, etc.* 453  
 (See also **POETRY**)  
 L Bacon's *Essays*. Introduction by Oliphant Smeaton. 10  
 (See also **PHILOSOPHY**)  
 Bagshot's *Literary Studies*. 2 vols. Intro. by George Sampson. 520-1  
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 L Brown's *Rab and his Friends, etc.* 116

# ESSAYS AND BELLES LETTRES—continued

- Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution and contingent Essays  
Introduction by A. J. Grieve, M.A. 480 (See also ORATORY)
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(See also FOR YOUNG PEOPLE) [Memory of W. V. 368]
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(See also BIOGRAPHY and HISTORY)
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duction by W. H. D. Rouse 807
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Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare etc. 161  
(See also POETRY)
2. Craik's Manual of English Literature, 346
- Curtis's Prose and I, and Letters. Introduction by R. W. Mable, 418
- De Quincey's (Thomas) Opium Eater. Intro. by Sir G. Douglas, 113  
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Introduction by R. Hill Burton, 809  
(See also BIOGRAPHY)
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- Elyot's Governour. Intro. and Glossary by Prof. Foster Watson, 117
- L. Emerson's Essays. First and second series, 10  
" " Nature. Conduct of Life. Essays from the Dial, 302  
" " Representative Men. Introduction by Ernest Rhys, 112  
" " Society and Solitude and Other Essays, 567  
(See also POETRY)
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- Froude's Short Studies. Vols. I and II, 13 103  
(See also HISTORY and BIOGRAPHY)
- Gifford's Literary Portraits. Intro. by Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, 245
- Goethe's Conversations with Eckermann. Intro. by Havelock Ellis  
251 (See also BIOGRAPHY and POETRY)
- Goldsmith's Citizen of the World and The Bee. Intro. by R. Church, 902  
(See also FICTION and POETRY)
- Hamilton's The Federalist, 412
- Hamlet's Lectures on the English Comic Writers, 411  
" " Shakespeare's Characters, 65  
" " Spirit of the Age and Lectures on English Poets, 452  
" " Table Talk, 311  
" " Plain Speaker. Introduction by P. P. Howe, 414
- L. Holmes' Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, 60  
" " Poet at the Breakfast Table, 64  
" " Professor at the Breakfast Table, 67
- L. Hudson's (W. H.) A Legend of the Lake in Colchester by Ernest Rhys, 902
- Hunt's (Leigh) Selected Essays. Introduction by J. B. Priestley, 802
- L. Huxley's Address on Science and Poetry, 135
- L. Irving's Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, 111  
(See also BIOGRAPHY and HISTORY)
- Lander's Imaginary Conversations and Poems. A selection. Edited  
with Introduction by Havelock Ellis, 833
- L. Lamb's Essays of Elia. Introduction by Augustine Birrell, 14  
(See also BIOGRAPHY and FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)
- Lowell's (James Russell) Among My Books, 601
- L. Macaulay's Essays, 1 vols. Introduction by A. J. Grieve, M.A. 205-8  
" " Miscellaneous Essays and The Lays of Ancient Rome, 438  
(See also HISTORY and ORATORY)
- Machiavelli's Prince. Special Trans. and Intro. by W. K. Marriott, 280  
(See also HISTORY)
- Martinsengo-Casarecco Countess' Essays in the Study of Folk-Songs, 671
- Mazzini's Duties of Man, etc. Introduction by Thomas Jones, M.A., 404
- Milton's Areopagitica, etc. Introduction by Professor C. E. Vaughan, 793  
(See also POETRY)
- L. Mitford's Our Village. Edited with Introduction, by Mr. John Squire, 907
- Montagu's (Lady) Letters. Introduction by R. Brinsley Johnson, 69
- L. Newman's On the Scope and Nature of University Education, and a  
paper on Christianity and Scientific Investigation. Introduction by  
(See also FOR YOUNG PEOPLE) [Walfred Ward, 13]
- Osborne's (Dorothy) Letters to Sir William Temple. Edited and com-  
mented by Judge Parry, 64
- Pena's The Peace of Europe. Some Fruits of Solitude, etc., 124

# ESSAYS AND BELLES-LETTRES—continued

- Prelude to Poetry, The. Edited by Ernest Rhys. 789  
 Roynold's Discourses. Introduction by L. March Phillipps. 118  
 L. Rhyw' New Book of Sense and Nonsense. 813  
 Rousseau's Emile. Translated by Barbara Foxley. 513  
 (See also PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY)  
 L. Ruskin's Crown of Wild Olive and Cestus of Aclala. 323  
 " Elements of Drawing and Perspective. 217  
 " Ethics of the Dust. Introduction by Grace Rhys. 282  
 " Modern Painters. 5 vols. Introduction by Lionel Cust. 208-12  
 " Pre-Raphaelitism. Lectures on Architecture and Painting, Academy Notes, 1855-9, and Notes on the Turner Gallery. Introduction by Laurence Binyon. 218  
 I. " Sesame and Lilies, The Two Paths, and The King of the Golden River. Introduction by Sir Oliver Lodge. 219  
 " Seven Lamps of Architecture. Intro. by Selwyn Image. 207  
 " Stones of Venice. 3 vols. Intro. by L. March Phillipps. 213-15  
 " Time and Tide with other Essays. 450  
 " Unto This Last, The Political Economy of Art. 216  
 (See also FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)  
 Spectator, The. 4 vols. Introduction by G. Gregory Smith. 164-7  
 Spencer's (Herbert) Essays on Education. Intro. by O. W. Elliot. 504  
 Sterne's Sentimental Journey and Journal and Letters to Eliza. Intro. (See also FICTION) (by George Saintsbury. 796  
 L. Stevenson's In the South Seas and Island Nights' Entertainments. 763  
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 Swift's Tale of a Tub, The Battle of the Books, etc. 547  
 (See also BIOGRAPHY AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)  
 Table Talk. Edited by J. O. Thorston. 996  
 Taylor's (Isaac) Words and Pieces, or Etymological Illustrations of History, Ethnology, and Geography. Intro. by Edward Thomas. 617  
 Thackeray's (W. M.) The English Humourists and The Four Georges. Introduction by Walter Jerrold. 610  
 (See also FICTION)  
 L. Thoreau's Walden. Introduction by Walter Raymond. 281  
 Trench's On the Study of Words and English Past and Present. Introduction by George Sampson. 788  
 Tytler's Essay on the Principles of Translation. 168  
 Walton's Compleat Angler. Introduction by Andrew Lang. 70

## FICTION

- Almard's The Indian Scout. 423  
 L. Ainsworth's (Harrison) Old St. Paul's. Intro. by W. E. A. Aron. 522  
 L. " " The Admirable Crichton. Intro. by E. Rhys. 804  
 L. " " The Tower of London. 400  
 L. " " Windsor Castle. 709  
 " " Rockwood. Intro. by Frank Swinnerton. 570  
 American Short Stories of the Nineteenth Century. Edited by John Cournut. 840  
 L. Austen's (Jane) Emma. Introduction by R. B. Johnson. 24  
 " " Mansfield Park. Introduction by R. B. Johnson. 23  
 L. " " Northanger Abbey and Persuasion. Introduction by R. B. Johnson. 25  
 L. " " Pride and Prejudice. Introduction by R. B. Johnson. 22  
 L. " " Sense and Sensibility. Intro. by R. B. Johnson. 21  
 L. Balzac's (Honoré de) Athéist's Mass. Preface by George Saintsbury. 229  
 " " Catherine de Médiel. Introduction by George Saintsbury. 419  
 " " Christ in Flanders. Introduction by George Saintsbury. 284  
 " " Cousin Pons. Intro. by George Saintsbury. 403  
 " " Eugénie Grandet. Intro. by George Saintsbury. 169  
 " " Les Illusions. Intro. by George Saintsbury. 656  
 L. " " Old Goriot. Introduction by George Saintsbury. 170  
 " " The Cat and Racket, and Other Stories. 349  
 " " The Chouans. Intro. by George Saintsbury. 285  
 " " The Country Doctor. Intro. George Saintsbury. 530  
 " " The Country Parson. 680  
 " " The Quest of the Absolute. Introduction by George Saintsbury. 256  
 " " The Rise and Fall of César Birotteau. 596  
 " " The Wild Ass's Skin. Intro. by George Saintsbury. 26  
 " " Ursule Mirouët. Intro. by George Saintsbury. 732

# FICTION—continued

- Barbours & Under Fire Translated by Fitzwater Wray 723  
 Beaumont's (Mary) Jean Seaton. Intro by R. F. Horton, D.D. 327  
 Bennett's (Arnold) The Old Wives Tale 918  
 Blackmore's (R. U.) Lorna Doone. 304  
 " " " " Springhaven. 350  
 " " " " Introduction by Thomas Seacombe 119  
 " " " " Roman's Rye 120 (See also TRAVEL)  
 Brontë's (Anne) The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Agnes Grey 635  
 " (Charlotte) Jane Eyre Introduction by May Sinclair 237  
 " " " " Shirley Introduction by May Sinclair 233  
 " " " " The Professor Introduction by May Sinclair 417  
 " " " " Villette Introduction by May Sinclair 351  
 " (Emily) Wuthering Heights 343  
 Burney's (Fanny) Evelina. Introduction by R. B. Johnson. 353  
 Butler's (Samuel) Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited. Introduction by Desmond MacCarthy 381  
 " " " " The Way of All Flesh Introduction by A. J. Hopps 315  
 Collins (Wilkie) The Woman in White 461  
 Conrad's Lord Jim Introduction by R. B. Cunninghame Graham. 915  
 Converse's (Florence) Long Walk 322  
 Dana's (Richard H.) Two Years before the Mast. 331  
 Daudet's Tartarin of Tarascon and Tartarin on the Alps. 423  
 Defoe's Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders Intro by G. A. Aitken  
 " Captain Singleton. Introduction by Edward Garnett. 74 [537]  
 " Journal of the Plague Year Introduction by G. A. Aitken. 259  
 " Memoirs of a Cavalier Introduction by G. A. Aitken. 233  
 " " " " (See also FOR YOUNG PEOPLE) (Chesteron.)  
 CHARLES DICKENS' WORKS Each volume with an Introduction by G. A. Aitken  
 " American Notes 290  
 " Little Dorrit 293  
 " Barnaby Rudge 76  
 " Martin Chuzzlewit 241  
 " Bleak House. 236  
 " Nicholas Nickleby 233  
 " Child's History of England 191  
 " Old Curiosity Shop 173  
 " Christmas Books. 239  
 " Oliver Twist. 223  
 " Christmas Stories. 414  
 " Our Mutual Friend 294  
 " David Copperfield. 242  
 " Pickwick Papers. 234  
 " Dombey and Son. 240  
 " Reprinted 1860s. 244  
 " Edwin Drood. 715  
 " Sketches by Box 231  
 " Great Expectations. 234  
 " Tale of Two Cities. 102  
 " Hard Times. 291  
 " Uncommercial Traveller 336  
 " Dombey's Coningsby Introduction by Langdon Davies. 335  
 Dostoevsky's (Fyodor) Crime and Punishment. Introduction by Laurence Irving 361  
 " " " " Letters from the Underground and Other Tales. Translated by C. J. Hogarth 634  
 " " " " Poor Folk and The Gambler Translated by C. J. Hogarth. 711  
 " " " " The Possessed Introduction by J. Middleton Murry 2 vols. 261 2 [533]  
 " " " " Prison Life in Siberia. Intro by Madame Stepanov. The Brothers Karamazov Translated by Constance Garnett 2 vols. 301 3  
 " " " " The Idiot 68  
 Du Maurier's (George) Trilby Introduction by Sir Gerald du Maurier With the original illustrations 363  
 Dumas Black Tulip Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 174  
 " " " " Chicot the Jester 421  
 " " " " Le Chevalier de Meisson Rouge Intro by Julius Bramont. 214  
 " " " " Marguerite de Valois (La Petite Margot) 3 4  
 " " " " The Count of Monte Cristo 2 vols. 393-4  
 " " " " The Forty Five 400  
 " " " " The Three Musketeers. 21  
 " " " " The Vicomte de Bragelonne 3 vols. 593 3  
 " " " " Twenty Years After Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 173  
 Edgar's Creamy and Picklers. Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 17  
 " Munnymede and Lincoln Fair Intro. by L. K. Hughes. 329  
 " (See also FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)  
 Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent and The Absentee. 410  
 Eliot's (George) Adam Bede 27  
 " " " " Felix Holt. 353  
 " " " " Middlemarch 2 vols. 354-5  
 " " " " Mill on the Floss. Intro Sir W. Robertson Nicoll. 319  
 " " " " Romola. Introduction by Rudolf Dirks. 331  
 " " " " Scenes of Clerical Life. 483

# FICTION—continued

- Elliot's (George) *Silas Marner*. Introduction by Annie Matheson. 121
- English Short Stories. An Anthology. 743
- Erichmann-Christman's *The Conscript and Waterloo*. 354
- Hogarth. 2 vols. 706-7
- Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer*. 77
- " " *The Last of the Mohicans*. 79
- " " *The Pathfinder*. 78
- " " *The Pioneers*. 171
- " " *The Prairie*. 172
- Ferrier's (Susan) *Marriage*. Introduction by R. L. Merrow. 816
- Fielding's *Amelia*. Intro. by George Saintsbury. 2 vols. 352-3
- " *Jonathan Wild*, and *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*. Introduction by George Saintsbury. 877
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- Gail's *Annals of a Parish*. Introduction by Basil Macdonald. 427
- Gaskell's (Mrs.) *Cousin Phyllis*, etc. Intro. by Thos. Seecombe. 615
- " *Cranford*. 83
- " *Mary Barton*. Introduction by Thomas Seecombe. 593
- " *North and South*. 660
- " *Sylvia's Lovers*. Intro. by Mrs. Ellis Chadwick. 524
- Gleig's (G. R.) *The Subaltern*. 703
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(See also ESSAYS and POETRY)
- Gogol's (Nicolai) *Dead Souls*. Translated by C. J. Hogarth. 728
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- Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. Introduction by J. M. D. 295  
(See also ESSAYS and POETRY)
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- Harte's ( Bret) *Luck of Roaring Camp* and other Tales. 681
- Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. Intro. by Ernest Rhys. 176
- " *The Scarlet Letter*. 123
- " *The Blithedale Romance*. 592
- " *The Marble Faun*. Intro. by Sir Leslie Stephen. 424
- " *Twice Told Tales*. 531  
(See also FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)
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- " *Towers of the Sea*. Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 509
- Italian Short Stories. Edited by D. Petrocchio. 876
- James's (G. P. R.) *Richelieu*. Introduction by Rudolf Darks. 357
- James's (Henry) *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Aspern Papers*. 912
- Kingsley's (Charles) *Alton Locke*. 462
- " " *Hereward the Wake*. Intro. by Ernest Rhys. 296
- " " *Hyppatia*. 230
- " " *Westward Ho!* Introduction by A. G. Gaseya. 20
- " " *Yeast*. 611  
(See also POETRY and FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)
- " (Henry) *Geoffrey Hamlyn*. 416
- " *Ravenshoe*. 28
- Lawrence's (D. H.) *The White Peacock*. 914
- Lover's *Harry Lorrequer*. Introduction by Lewis Melville. 177
- Loui's (Pierre) *Island Fisherman*. Translated by W. P. Balcan. 920
- Lover's *Handy Andy*. Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 178
- Lytton's *Harold*. Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 15
- " *Last Days of Pompeii*. 80
- " *Last of the Barons*. Introduction by R. G. Watkin. 13
- " *Rienzi*. Introduction by E. H. Braham, M.A. 531  
(See also TRAVEL)
- MacDonald's (George) *Sir Gibbous*. 673  
(See also ROMANCE) (Mrs. Hinkson). 324
- Manning's *Mary, Perch and Deborah's Diary*. Intro. by Katherine Tynan
- " *Sir Thomas More*. Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 19

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**Black Dwarf and Legend of**  
**Montrose.** 145  
**Bride of Lammermoor** 149  
**Castle Dangerous and The Sur-**  
**geon's Daughter** 130  
**Count Robert of Paris.** 131  
**L. Fair Maid of Perth** 132  
**Fortunes of Nigel.** 71  
**L. Guy Rannering** 133  
**L. Heart of Midlothian, The** 134  
**Highland Widow and Deirdre** 227  
 (See also **NOVELS** and **POETRY**)  
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 Wood's (Mrs. Henry) The Channery. 84  
 Yonge's (Charlotte M.) The Dove in the Eagle's Nest. 322  
 " " The Hair of Redclyffe. Intro. Mrs. Meynell. 362  
 (See also FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.)  
 Zola's (Emile) Germinal. Translated by Havelock Ellis. 597

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- Memorials of Cantebury 83
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- Macaulay's Speeches on Politics and Literature. 399 (See also ESSAYS and HISTORY)
- Pitt's Orations on the War with France 145

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 Koran, *The*. Rodwell's Translation. 388  
 Latimer's Sermons. Introduction by Canon Beeching. 40  
 Law's Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life. 91  
 Leibniz's Philosophical Writings. Selected and trans. by Mary Morris.  
 Introduction by G. R. Morris, M.A. 305  
 Locke's Two Treatises of Civil Government. Introduction by Professor  
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 With Introduction by A. D. Lindsay. 483  
 " Subjection of Women. (See WOLLESTONECRAFT, Mary, under SCIENCE.)  
 More's Utopia. Introduction by Judge O'Hagan. 461  
 New Testament. Arranged in the order in which the books came to the  
 Christians of the First Century. 93  
 Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. Intro. by Dr. Charles Serolea. 686  
 (See also ESSAYS)  
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 M. M. Bozman. 892  
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 C.I.E. 403  
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 (See also ESSAYS)  
 St. Augustine's Confessions. Dr. Pusey's Translation. 206  
 St. Francis: The Little Flowers, and The Life of St. Francis. 455  
 Seely's Ecco Homo. Introduction by Sir Oliver Lodge. 305  
 Spinoza's Ethics, etc. Translated by Andrew J. Boyle. With Intro-  
 duction by Professor Santayana. 481  
 Swedenborg's (Emanuel) Heaven and Hell. 379  
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 " " The Divine Providence. 655  
 " " The True Christian Religion. 693

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 Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Select Plays of*. Introduction by Professor  
 Baker, of Harvard University. 506  
 Björnson's Plays. Vol. I. The Newly Married Couple, Leonardo, A  
 Gauntlet. Translated by R. Farquharson Sharp. 625  
 " " Vol. II. The Editor, The Bankrupt, and The King.  
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 L Browning's Poems, 1844-84. 42  
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 Chaucer: Six Plays, translated by Edward Fitzgerald. 310  
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 Coleridge, *Golden Book of*. Edited by Stopford A. Brooke. 43  
 (See also ESSAYS)  
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 (See also BIOGRAPHY)  
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(See also ESSAYS and FICTION) [well. 921]
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(See also ESSAYS and FICTION)
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- Heins' Prose and Poetry. 311
- Herbert's Temple. Introduction by Edward Thomas. 309
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- Kenn's Poems. 161
- Kingsley's (Charles) Poems. Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 193  
(See also FICTION and FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)
- Langland's (William) Piers Plowman. 371
- Leasing's Laocoon, Minna von Barnhelm, and Nathan the Wise. 343
- Longfellow's Poems. Introduction by Katherine Tegen. 352
- Marlowe's Plays and Poems. Introduction by Edward Thomas. 363
- Milton's Poems. Introduction by W. H. D. Rouse. 364  
(See also ESSAYS)
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by Professor Thorndike. Vol. II Comedy. 491-2
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(See also FICTION)
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(See also BIOGRAPHY and FICTION)
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- " Tragedies. 155
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Henderson. 379
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(See also ESSAYS, FICTION, and TRAVEL) [Travel, Ballads. 768]
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- " Vol. II, 1857-70. 608 [Harrison. 392]
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- Whitman's (Walt) Leaves of Grass (I), Democratic Vistas, etc. 373
- Wilde (Oscar) Plays, Prose Writings and Poems. 333
- Wordsworth's Shorter Poems. Introduction by Ernest Rhys. 203
- " Longer Poems. Note by Editor. 311

## REFERENCE

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 Biographical Dictionary of English Literature. 449  
 Biographical Dictionary of Foreign Literature. 500  
 Dates, Dictionary of. 554  
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 " " " III. Asia. Do. 553  
 " " " IV. Africa and Australia. Do. 562  
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 " " Wild Wales. Intro by Theodore Watts-Dunton. 49  
 (See also FICTION)  
 Boewell's Tour in the Hebrides with Dr. Johnson. 387  
 (See also BIOGRAPHY)  
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 Linglake's Eothen. Introduction by Harold Spender M.A. 337  
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 Lytton's Pilgrims of the Rhine. 330  
 (See also FICTION)  
 Mandeville's (Sir John) Travels. Introduction by Jules Bramont. 913  
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 Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers. Selected by E. H. Blakeney M.A. 715  
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 Roberts' The Western Averara. Intro by Cunningham Graham. 763  
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 1. " Little Women and Good Wives. Intro by Grace Rhya. 241  
 Andersen's Fairy Tales. Illustrated by the Brothers Robinson. 4  
 " More Fairy Tales. Illustrated by Mary Shillabeer. 923  
 Annals of Fairyland. The Reign of King Oberon. 385  
 " " The Return of King Cole. 366  
 " " The Reign of King Herla. 541  
 Asgard and the Norse Heroes. Translated by Mrs. Boult. 939  
 Baker's Cast Up by the Sea. 539  
 1. Ballantyne's Coral Island. 745  
 " Martin Rattler. 749  
 " Logava. Introduction by Ernest Rhya. 210 [112]  
 1. Browne's (Frances) Granny's Wonderful Chair. Intro by Louie Radford.  
 Bulfinch's (Thomas) The Age of Fable. 472  
 " Legends of Charlemagne. Intro by Ernest Rhya. 555  
 1. Canton's A Child Book of Saints. Illustrated by T. H. Robinson. 61  
 (See also ESSAYS)

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- Tales from Chaucer*. 537
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    (See also FICTION)
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- Edgar's *Heroes of England*. 471  
    (See also FICTION)
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    Mrs. Greville's *Remembrances*. 730
1. Fairy Gold. Illustrated by Herbert Cole. 157
1. Fairy Tales from the Arabian Nights. Illustrated. 249
- Freeman's *Old English History for Children*. 610
- Frisson's *Chronicles*. 57
- Gatty's *Parables from Nature*. Introduction by Grace Rhys. 158
- Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. Illustrated by R. Anning Bell. 56
1. Hawthorne's *Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*. 5  
    (See also FICTION)
- Howard's *Rattlin the Reecer*. Introduction by Guy Pocock. 857
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- Ingelow's (Jean) *Mopsy the Fairy*. Illustrated by Dora Curtis. 619
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1. Kingsley's *Heroes*. Introduction by Grace Rhys. 118
- " *Madam How and Lady Why*. Introduction by C. I. Gardiner, M.A. 177
- " *Water Babies and Gargons*. 217  
    (See also POETRY and FICTION)
- Kingston's *Peter the Waler*. 6
- " *Three Midshipmen*. 7
1. Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. Illustrated by A. Rackham. 3  
    (See also BIOGRAPHY and ESSAYS)
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- Marryat's *Children of the New Forest*. 747
- " *Little Savage*. Introduction by R. Brimley Johnson. 159
- " *Masterman Ready*. Introduction by R. Brimley Johnson. 160
- " *Settlers in Canada*. Introduction by R. Brimley Johnson. 370
- " (Edited by) *Rattlin the Reecer*. 857  
    (See also FICTION)
- Martineau's *Fests on the Floods, etc.* Illustrated by A. Rackham. 429
- Mother Goose's *Nursery Rhymes*. Illustrated. 473
- Poetry Book for Boys and Girls. Edited by Guy Pocock. 894
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- " *The Boy Slaves*. Introduction by Guy Pocock. 797
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    (See also ESSAYS)
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1. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Illustrated by A. Rackham. 60  
    (See also BIOGRAPHY and ESSAYS)
1. Swiss Family Robinson. Illustrations by Chas. Follard. 430
- Verne's (Jules) *Abandoned*. 50 Illustrations. 363
- " *Dropped from the Clouds*. 50 Illustrations. 367
1. " *Five Weeks in a Balloon and Around the World in Eighty Days*. Translated by Arthur Chambers and P. Desages. 319 [119]
1. " *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. 319 [119]
1. " *The Secret of the Island*. 50 Illustrations. 369
1. Yonge's (Charlotte M.) *The Book of Golden Deeds*. 330
- " *The Luncheon of Lynwood*. Illustrated by Dora Curtis. 579
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    (See also FICTION)

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